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# TIME

# THE COMEDIAN

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BY  
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"A CIRCLE IN THE SAND"



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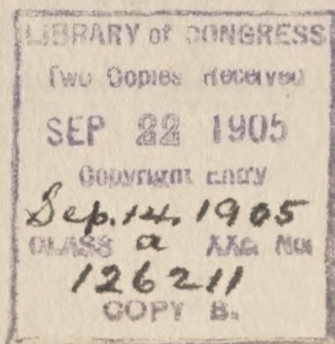
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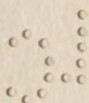


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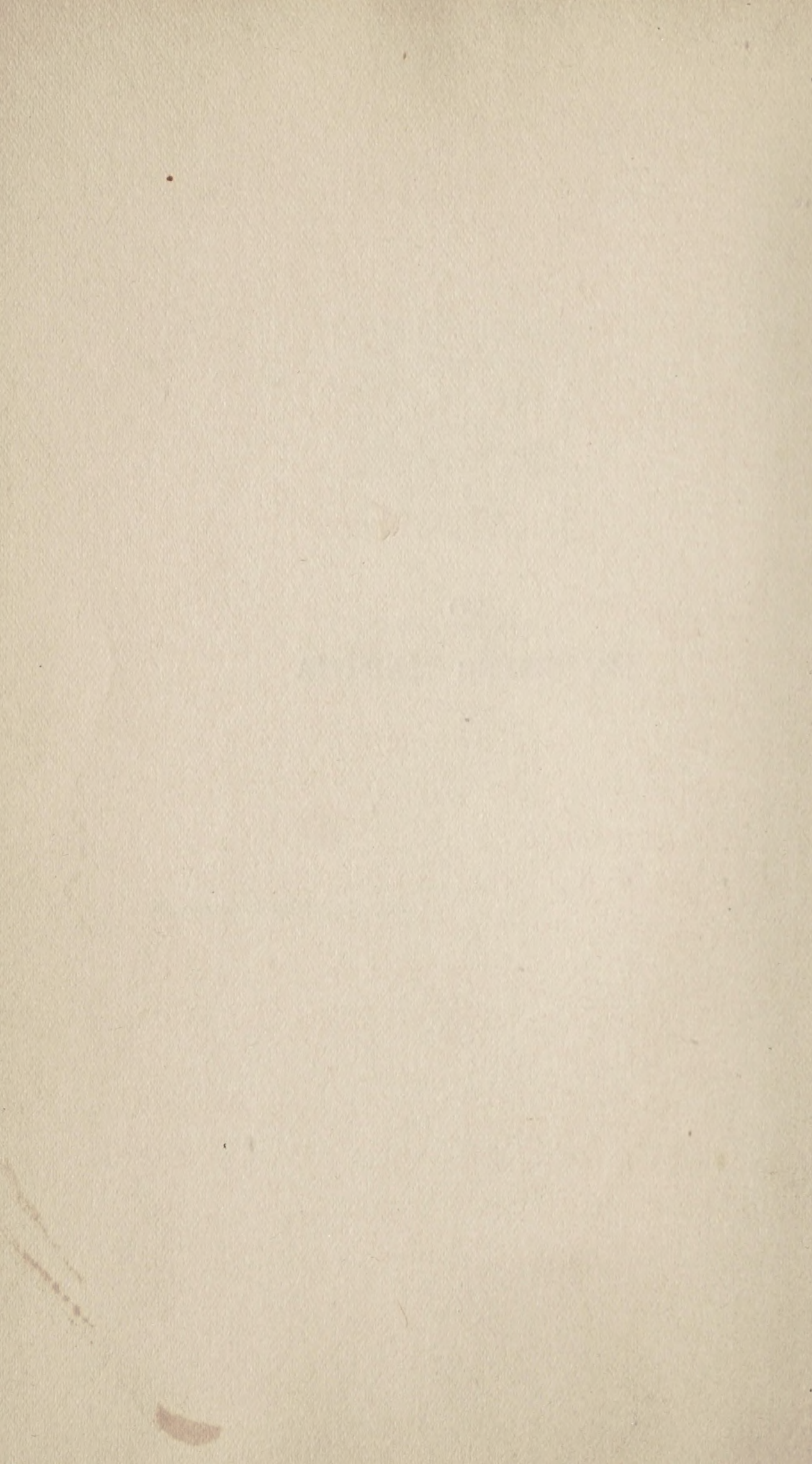
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TO  
MY SISTER MARTHA







# TIME, THE COMEDIAN

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## CHAPTER I

**IT** was one of Nora Dakon's bad days. She sat by the disordered breakfast-table in a muslin dressing-jacket and petticoat, pressed her knuckles into her cheek, and wrote with her fork on the table-cloth over and over again, "Bate's Crossing."

Hannah appeared in the doorway. She was hard-featured, strong as a dray-horse, with big-boned hands outspread on her hips.

"The man is here for the meat order, m'm," she said.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Dakon drawled, and still scrawled "Bate's Crossing" on the cloth; "I don't know what to get."



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“A fricassee of chicken with dumplings? Mr. Dakon likes that.”

“That’s as good as anything.”

“Shall I have the tomatoes stewed, or cut up raw?”

“Why—well—” she said, without looking up, “just as you like.”

“Stewed with bread-crusts?”

“Yes—yes—stewed, then, Hannah,” and she flung the fork from her nervously.

“I haven’t no saleratus.”

Nora closed her eyes and sprang up.

“Get it, then. Get what you need—anything—anything. Don’t ask me again. I am going up to lie down.”

“Ain’t you well? You look like fever. It’s the spring. Shall I put a little lime-water in Miss Ruth’s milk for her dinner? I think she’s bilious.”

“Yes.”

Mrs. Dakon rushed up-stairs. In her own room she pressed her fists to her temples.

“Oh, it’s killing me! This place is killing



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

me! I'll go mad—I know I will. I can't—I can't—I can't——”

She broke into passionate sobbing and went to the window. The May day was lovely. Bird life stirred in the wistaria around the window. A lamb bleated from a neighbor's pasture. The village street was sunk in sunshiny coma. Nora looked at these things and hated them all. She drew in the green blinds till the room was as cool and dim as a cave. Her hands shook as she took off her clothes and slipped on a nightgown of tender-colored dimity, smelling of orris. When she had flung some branches of lilac on the bed, she followed them, burying her face in the blossoms, her hair making a pale-gold net over them.

In this manner she frequently salved her ailment, which was of the mind. Hour after hour she would lie in the shadow and quiet, hating her life, longing for what it lacked. The craving was a banal thing made up of small, unsatisfied appetites, and they tortured her now.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

She was poor, and she required money as a flower requires water. She lived in Bate's Crossing in a ten-roomed cottage on a prim street, and she longed for an apartment in New York, reached by a smart lift. She was beautiful, and carried her twenty-eight years as if they were eighteen, but her beauty was a possession as useless as her one bauble, a rare amethyst comb that had been her grandmother's, and which she never wore. There was no achievement in being anything or having anything in Bate's Crossing.

"Eight years of it!" she said aloud, as she lay there, clutching the lilacs. "Eight years of Bate's Crossing! This is eighteen hundred and ninety, and, I dare say, the new century will find me groveling here."

She thought of the first year of her marriage. It was to her life what a jewel would be in a peasant's smock. It had been spent in Paris, London, and New York. Life had sung in victorious measures. For one year she had been the petted wife of a rich man; then



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

came failure, shock, blackness, and, at nineteen, she had found herself bound and beggared.

It was the common story of misplaced trust on the part of Anthony Dakon's father in a man who had seemed good. The good man died. The Dakon investments were found to be a fiction, Anthony's income having been regularly paid to keep up the fraud. The Dakon fortune had long been swallowed in speculation.

Months of struggle afterward in a New York boarding-house, where the towels were few and the stewed prunes many, was not a pleasant memory to Mrs. Dakon on this heavily scented spring day; but even that time had had its variety and sparkle. The shops had been a paradise where boredom was forgotten, even if she went only to price things or to send them home to be paid for, without meaning to keep them, and men had looked at her on the streets as only pretty women are looked at.

Anthony, at this time, hoped to rebuild his



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

fortunes by an invention to be used in chemicals, over which he had toiled and dreamed, but it had failed. When a good position had been offered him in a factory where muslins were colored and where his expert scientific knowledge was to help find those colors, he was glad to make his defeated way to Bate's Crossing with his wife and baby.

Here Mrs. Dakon's reflections ceased to pass progressively. She had arrived at a stone wall. She had come to Bate's Crossing eight years before. She was there still. She was likely to die there. The thought was intolerable. She pushed away the lilacs and went to the open window, placing her hands above her head on the cool glass to ease their fever.

"Some women would manage to escape from this. Some women would go—somewhere—at any cost. Why can't I?" she thought with fury against herself; "I couldn't leave Ruth, that's it. And Tony—he does his best. It isn't his fault. I suppose I couldn't leave him, either. I suppose I couldn't forget



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

his face. I suppose I'll just stay on until I grow into a wrinkled frump—or else go crazy. Oh, I feel queer to-day!”

The sound of regular footsteps on the brick-paved street attracted her and she leaned out. It was a village funeral, the coffin on a cart, the mourners following. Some creature had left Bate's Crossing forever.

A ruminative look came into Mrs. Dakon's eyes as the thought of death came nearer. Suppose Tony died before she did? Bate's Crossing would be a necessity no longer. . . . There was his life insurance. . . . Suppose he died soon. . . . Poor Tony! . . . She would be a young and beautiful widow. . . . She looked so well in black—fair women always did. . . . Some people thought the little white wristbands and collar a labeling of oneself as widowed; how ridiculous! . . . She would be certain to wear them. . . . Poor Tony! . . . She heard herself showering all the virtues on him in the past tense! . . . Poor dear, at times he looked very ill. . . .



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Ruth and she would go away to New York and live simply on her small income; Ruth should wear all white, and they would go out together, hand in hand along Broadway, she in her crêpe and violets and those darling little cuffs, and they'd go into crowded restaurants for luncheon, or walk in the park. . . . And sometime, somewhere, among the many men who told her by their glances she was lovely, there would be one or two paying her fascinating little attentions—flowers, bonbons, French novels. . . . She might go to Europe. . . . Poor Tony! . . .

“Noddy?”

At the whispered word she felt herself clutched and came out of her reverie. A girl of nine was gazing up at her with motherly inquisitiveness. She was covered by a Holland apron to the edge of her red skirt, a comb shaped like a half circle pushed her brown hair back from her forehead, which projected in a thoughtful curve over bright, greenish-hazel eyes. As she smiled, a very deep, irregu-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

lar dimple flickered in one cheek; her lips moved whimsically. It was an elfin face of beauty and mystery.

“Noddy, ain’t you coming down to lunch?” she asked.

Mrs. Dakon had taught Ruth to call her by this corruption of her Christian name. The sound of “mother” or “mama” was unpleasant to her.

“You don’t mean, Ruth darling, that it’s noon?” sighed Mrs. Dakon.

“Yep. We got a half holiday because Deacon Allen is dead,” and her eyes sparkled.

“Poor man! you mustn’t rejoice over his death, Ruth,” said Mrs. Dakon, in indifferent remonstrance as she dressed.

“But, Noddy, he was over sixty, and he useter comb his hair in a long, slinky scrap over his head,” Ruth explained volubly, “for there wasn’t—a—single smitch—no, not—a—*single—smitch—up—there!* And he useter grunt when he stood up, and shake if a door was slammed, and his eyes cried all—the—



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

time! And one tooth waggled whenever he spoke, like this," said Ruth, pushing one of her own seed-pearls over her lip, and adding with a ministerial air, a perfect and unconscious imitation of the lank village clergyman: "So, I guess it's just as well he's with his Father in Heaven. Don't you, Noddy?"

Mrs. Dakon's smile was checked by the sober, questioning face.

"I suppose so, darling. Come along, and remember not to say 'ain't' and 'yep' and 'guess.'"

With Ruth's arrival Mrs. Dakon's black mood passed and left her in a twilight regret, poetic and pointless. After luncheon she let the child brush her hair until the caressing fingers sent her to sleep.

When the regular breathing told Ruth that her task was ended, she put away the brush and looked at her mother with an unchildish thoughtfulness, her finger on her lip. She admired her more than any one she had ever seen. Angels, she knew, had just such golden



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

hair, so slippery to the touch, and just such deep gray eyes, with lashes around them like brown gauze, and just such little hands. Her mother was prettier than Allison Blount, the beauty of the school, and she didn't seem a grown-up mother, either. In fact, Ruth felt an instinct of mature protection toward her mother, and this was shown now by her lifting a shawl and gently covering her with it before she stole away, with considerate eyes looking backward.

When Anthony Dakon came home at six o'clock the table was arranged with sprays of lilac, and Nora wore a low-necked lawn gown of the same color. She dressed for dinner only occasionally, too discontented, as a rule, to feel sufficient interest.

He kissed the delicately powdered cheek she lifted to him, and stood for a moment a little bewildered by fatigue before he dropped into the chair by which she stood. They suggested shadow and light. Instead of thirty-six, he looked more than forty. His black



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

hair was lustrous with silver; his patient eyes were those from which the inventor's dream had vanished.

The man that never aspires has the belief to comfort him that he might, perhaps, if he would; but he that has striven to catch the bubble of any ambition and has fallen into space with empty hands, is forever in sack-cloth before the inward presence that urged him on. This was the mark on Anthony Dakon. Loss of fortune had been nothing. The failure of his invention had been fatal. His confidence in himself was splintered beyond mending. He was a competent drudge, and would be one to the end.

He went to the door, but paused to look curiously at his wife.

"What are you staring at?" she asked.

"You get prettier every day, Nora."

"That's the first compliment in ages."

"That's a bully gown."

"Oh, it's all the gown—not I!" she said impatiently.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

When he had gone she sat there, swinging her feet, her vanity smarting. Were all marriages at the best like hers after eleven years? —the passion, the dream, the excitement of each new day all gone? Anthony's tepid, unaccustomed praise had, for a second, aroused a radiant ghost of her life as it had been when he had swept her into marriage by his impelling, burning love.

"The difference!" she thought drearily; though, as she caught sight of her frowning face in a mirror, she carefully smoothed out the line between her brows.

She had not the understanding to realize that her husband's love for her had passed into his blood and was part of himself, though he had lost the art of expressing it. He would have died for her; he supposed she knew this, and it seemed enough. But it never is enough. These silent husbands are fatal mistakes. A woman does not want to know that the sun, though overcast, is in the sky; she wants to feel its heat wrapping her life. There is usu-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

ally an understudy preparing somewhere to play opposite parts to a pretty woman where the husband has failed to give intensity to his lines.

At dinner Nora ate almost nothing. She was silent except when she corrected Ruth for humming, and feeding the cat. There was nothing to talk about. She had been reading a novel that afternoon, its scenes laid in Monte Carlo. Would she ever see that place? Or ever drive again as she did during one delicious year down the Rue Royale to the boulevards? Or look from a London hansom at the delicious greenness of Bird-Cage Walk?

Anthony's voice broke in upon her dreaming.

"I've some pleasant news for you, Nora."

She felt no expectation.

"I did what might have been a foolish thing, but fortunately it has turned out all right. I had a letter, a month ago, from one of my old friends, a broker in New York, giving me some inside information about a speculation that could not fail. He did it out of pure



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

good-nature. Well, I don't believe in risks, but, for a good reason, I ventured. I had put a part of my savings in a New York Central bond. This I put up as margin and bought a hundred shares of gas. It went up ten points, and I sold out almost at the highest figure."

"I don't understand a word of this, Tony."

"It means I made a thousand dollars."

"Oh, that's good."

"Seven hundred as savings will be practically as good as a thousand," he said, with his brief smile. "You shall have three hundred, Nora, and you and Ruth shall go to New York for a holiday."

She grew very pale. A long sigh went through her. Her eyes became rapacious.

"Do you mean it?"

"You can go to Aunt Abby, you know, for part of the time."

"A month," she said, and her hand closed over Ruth's.

"May is lovely in New York. I only wish



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

I could go with you. I'll write to Lawrence Brundage to take you about. Larry's an awful swell, but the best-natured fellow in the world."

"O Tony!" was all she could say, and seeing a look of expectancy on his face, she went to his chair and kissed him.

Her mind-picture of his death, which had been pleasantly sad, came back to her memory and touched her to a light remorse. As she ran her fingers through his hair, she murmured, "I wish you could come, too."



## CHAPTER II

IT was after eleven. Breakfast was ready for Lawrence Brundage. Jenkins, who was almost a second mind to him as well as hands and feet, had pushed the table close to the open window, and, under the fluttering awning, bits of morning life on Fifth Avenue flashed up in the May brilliance.

Brundage appeared, an early morning frown on his otherwise agreeable face. Like many chronic travelers, he adopted within doors whatever of foreign habits was most conducive to comfort. In winter he liked for lounging a wadded Japanese kimono of dark silk, and felt slippers with one-toed, woolen stockings. For this warm morning he had put on a white linen suit, thin and loose, the sort



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

he wore in the tropics, and his bare feet were in cane sandals. Clothes never dignified him. He gave character to whatever he wore.

His figure was like an English guardsman's, strong and graceful. Except for his light gray eyes, heavy and with a puffiness under them which proclaimed him a reckless liver at a glance, he was as Spanish as one of Velasquez's grandees. His expression was lazy. There was no expectancy in the face, but his smile was charming, and flashed over the weariness like a light.

Jenkins uncovered a dish of strawberries and placed them before him, at the same time speaking in his self-effacing semitones.

"You didn't say positively you'd go to Tuxedo with Mr. Wix, sir. Shall I pack?"

"No. I forgot to mention that I'm not going."

"The deuce you say!" cried Wix, who entered in riding clothes. "Why not?"

"Breakfasted?" asked Lawrence.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

The other, perspiring and breathless, sprawled in a chair. He was a type that was at its best a century ago. He should have been a fox-hunting squire who lived in the pink and got drunk every night. His hair was as pale as new rope, and his short, thick nose verged on plum-color; in another five years his figure would have the outlines of a squat toby.

“I’ve had a cocktail and coffee at Claremont—two things that keep their charm no matter how seedy I am. Why aren’t you going to Tuxedo?”

“If I said it was because I didn’t want to, Charlie, would you think that sufficient?”

“Oh, if there’s any mystery about it—” came testily.

“There’s no mystery—merely this: I got a letter last night from Tony Dakon.”

“Isn’t he dead? Thought he went under, ages ago,” Wix said, in an injured tone, as he took a match from Jenkins.

“Well, he didn’t, poor old Tony. He



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

might as well, though—scratching for a living in a factory in Pennsylvania.”

“Bet he’s struck you for a loan, for old affection’s sake!”

Lawrence’s light eyes flashed; his lip gave a characteristic curl.

“We won’t discuss him. I forgot you didn’t know him very well.”

The color rushed into Wix’s face. His fortune, now on its last legs, was a new one, and had been made by his father in a certain toilet-water.

“What do you mean by that? I knew him well enough to think he gave himself damned airs.”

“Charlie, shut up! You get more choleric every day. Try dieting. Now let me finish about Tony Dakon, who was and is a thoroughbred, as fine a chap as God ever made, and with a run of the blackest luck following him.” The fatigue had gone from his face. It shone with sincere affection. “This letter, which came last night, tells me his wife and



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

her little daughter have come to New York on a short visit. He asks me to give her as much attention as I can, to do what I can to make her enjoy herself. I can imagine the poor woman is worn out from life in that hideous town. I mean to give her a good time."

Wix broke into a roar of laughter and kicked his legs.

"Will you go up Fifth Avenue with them? By Jove! I'll stay in the club window and see the show, you and the countrywoman and the kid!"

He sprang up and gave a mincing exhibition of an over-attentive escort stooping to talk to a child and smiling with oily, exaggerated sweetness. This was followed by antics with a supposititious doll, the setting off of pinwheels and blowing of balloons. The whole thing was a bit of perfect rough comedy. Lawrence roared, and Jenkins could not help a smile passing over his monk-like face.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

People often wondered at Brundage's friendship for Charlie Wix, why he chose to have him share his houses and go with him on his long yachting cruises. This was the secret. Wix amused him. His caustic, coarse tongue and perfect mimicry could make him laugh. He was a present-day survival of a king's jester.

"You make me eager for the experience," said Lawrence. "Our cry to-day is, 'Lord, give us something new!' I'll fly a balloon with Tony's child, I swear."

"While the mother looks on with a reticule over her arm, dressed all in drab silk, fastened with a brooch made of mother's hair!" said Wix.

"I saw her at a distance ten years ago, in Paris. Jove! she was pretty then. Looked something like Ingres's 'La Source.' Just that big-eyed innocence and apple-blossom coloring!"

"Well, after a ten-years' dose of pie and hot bread for breakfast, of making over her



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

clothes and doing the dusting, I'll bet she's yellow, with thin hair turning gray, and says 'Yes?' to everything."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Lawrence.



### CHAPTER III

MRS. DAKON went to a boarding-house in Thirty-second Street, near Fifth Avenue. It had been recommended by a friend to whom she had written. For the first three days she spent the time in the shops, mostly of the small and expensive sort, where she bought soft silk and mull frocks already made, which shamed those of the seamstress at Bate's Crossing. She also bought a big hat twined with pink roses for herself; a Leghorn flat for Ruth, under which her sparkling face was like a vivid flower; a big box of bonbons from a famous shop, silk stockings, big-buckled slippers, a flowering plant, novels, and fashion magazines. She drove from place to place in hansoms, lunched with Ruth at Delmonico's and the Brunswick, both of which had sweetest memories for her, and she thrilled with satis-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

faction as she saw the appreciative and speculative expressions on the faces of men she passed. Life was just as satisfying as it had been ten years before.

When the first keen edge of delight in simply being one of the crowd was gone, she sent a line to Lawrence Brundage and nervously waited for his appearance at the appointed hour. She and Ruth were arrayed in their prettiest clothes. Her pale blue muslin gave her face a porcelain pallor, and her gray eyes were like bright agates. When four o'clock came her hands were icy. She kept glancing at the door, fluffed her hair at the mirror, haunted the window, and gave a nervous twitch when the servant came up with Lawrence Brundage's card. As she went down the stairs with Ruth she felt helpless, awkward. This was the mark of Bate's Crossing upon her—a timidity belonging to school-days. She tried to arrange in her mind what she should say to this "awful swell," as Tony had described him. While she was still perturbed,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

she entered the parlor and found herself face to face with him.

He was leaning against the mantel directly opposite the door. But though he stood up straight quickly when she came in, he was too surprised to speak, and she saw the surprise. It gave her assurance, and she found herself murmuring at random the conventional nothings of greeting.

The visit lasted perhaps half an hour. During that time Lawrence took his eyes from Mrs. Dakon's face only when he petted Ruth, with whom he became a favorite at once.

This was the type of man Nora Dakon adored—good-looking, young, distinguished, fashionable, wealthy. She loved lazy eyes like his that brightened in appreciation of her chatter. He was a man who lived in the real sense, who had experienced everything, to whom stupendous luxury was as usual as bread and butter to her. She felt this with him. The suggestion that he had used up most of the best in him in the furnace of past emotions



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

piqued her imagination, which was full-fed on French novels. To have such a man admire her was the greatest triumph she had known in her life, and it was evident that he was astonished to find her beautiful, that he enjoyed being with her and meant to see a great deal of her. He had come because of friendship for Tony, and now he was thinking only of her.

As she talked of her life and what the visit to New York meant to her, while Ruth nestled against his knees and played with his watch-fob, she had a delightful, subconscious certainty of pleasant days in the future with him, perhaps of a friendship that would sponge the monotony from her life.

“What are you doing to-night?” he asked, making ready to leave—“anything?”

“We’re dining with Tony’s aunt. She has a house near the park, and lives alone. Next week we go to stay with her a while.”

“Breakfast with me to-morrow at Claremont, then.”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

"Delicious," she murmured.

"I'll get a box for to-morrow night at the Academy of Music. A big show. I want to watch Ruth at her first ballet," he said, putting his finger on her cheek where the dimple made a little well as she smiled up at him.

"I knew a little girl," he said, "who used to pray for a dimple like this, but she never got it."

"I didn't pray for it," said Ruth solemnly. "It didn't come from Heaven. It's only a dust-pan dimple."

"She means she fell down against the point of a dust-pan and it marked her cheek that way," Mrs. Dakon explained. "She calls it her dust-pan dimple."

"Keep this fact to yourself," said Lawrence, looking into Ruth's serious eyes as gravely, "or dust-pans will become fashionable and our beauties will try to fall against them at the proper angle. That big dimple is a nest for Cupid to move into and settle down, and he will, some day."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

After he left, Lawrence made ready for a long ride into Westchester. He reached the country club for dinner after eight. Wix had ridden up, too, and was sprawling in his usual fashion at a table, his third cocktail before him.

"Well, how's the balloon business?" he asked, when Lawrence joined him.

"Wait," was the answer given with a mysterious nod and smiling eyes. "Wait till you see Tony Dakon's wife. You'll be knocked down."

"From that smirk I take it that she's pretty."

"The loveliest little woman imaginable. Her eyes——"

Wix waved his hand.

"No more. I can fill out the picture, nose, mouth, hair, etc. Worth knowing?"

"Rather. At least I mean to know her. You wouldn't like her. She's a simple, honest little creature——"

"I'm fond of the simple, honest brand. A



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

woman needn't have a past in order to interest me."

"Your first instinct would be to help her manufacture one."

"Like your impudence!" said Wix, staring. "Since when did you go out of the business?"

"I've retired definitely," said Lawrence, and began to order dinner.

During three weeks following, Lawrence spent little time with Charlie Wix. A week's fishing in Canada had been given up, and there was every prospect of Lawrence's remaining in New York into June. Wix felt a personal resentment against Mrs. Dakon. Lawrence had become her shadow, but did not seem disposed to admit him to a close acquaintanceship with the country beauty. He had seen her driving with Lawrence, and one night he had dined with them at Claremont. It was annoying that she should have come to town just when it was getting hot, and smash all the plans made weeks before. Then, too, the devotion seemed likely to last. He had not seen



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Lawrence so interested in a woman in years. If he fell in love, really in love, what a muff he would become! There would be no fun with him. He would not go yachting or fishing; he might even go up and rusticate at Bate's Crossing.

"Wouldn't surprise me in the least," Wix thought as he made ready for dinner one night. "He's the kind of man a woman as pretty as she is could bowl clean over, and he wouldn't know it till he whacked his head. Why can't he be like me? There isn't enough feminine loveliness in the world to compare with a good canvasback and a quart of warm Burgundy."

Lawrence came in at this moment, and Wix faced him with a pout.

"Going to dine with me?"

"You're to have that honor."

"Why, what's the matter with the Bate's Crossing Venus? Has she a toothache?"

"I've been a truant, Charlie, I admit," said Lawrence, with a thoughtful self-conscious-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

ness in his laugh, and he strolled into his bedroom to dress.

Wix followed him, and made himself comfortable in an East Indian chair.

“It’s up to me to give you a few words of counsel. You’re making an awful ass of yourself, Larry. It can’t be you’re seriously ‘gone’ on this Mrs. Dakon.”

“If such madness should beset me, I alone shall suffer. She’s my friend’s wife, and I’m not a Frenchman.”

“But are you smitten there? If so, for heaven’s sake, cut it, and get your reason back. You look as gloomy this minute as a parson on a wet Sunday afternoon.”

“Don’t worry. She’ll soon be gone and no harm done,” he murmured. “Now talk of something else.”

Later, at dinner, he reverted to the subject himself.

“I want to speak seriously of Nora Dakon, Charlie.”

“Oh, it’s ‘Nora’ now? That’s a bad sign.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“ I must talk to some one, so be good enough to listen, and don’t sneer. I feel so sorry for her,” he said tenderly. “ Oh, I feel so horribly sorry for that little woman.”

“ Another bad sign—devilish bad,” Wix muttered rebelliously.

“ Only one week more of her holiday and she has to go back to prison. A few times she has let herself go and told me all. Why, her life is frightful! Better tragedies, crimes, than a monotony that atrophies one’s senses. After this draught of life it will be worse than before.”

“ She’s got a husband and child. What more does she want? ”

“ She doesn’t want Bate’s Crossing,” said Lawrence angrily. “ She’s fit for something better.”

“ There isn’t much to her besides her face, is there? ”

“ She isn’t clever, true enough. If she had resources within herself, she could get beyond even Bate’s Crossing, in fancy. Her world



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

is what's round about her and can be seen with her two eyes. She's very much of a child. Her taste is for the great theater of the world, with a bit of the lime-light for herself now and then. That's all she needs. In such an environment the hardest duty would be easy."

"You can't make her out a heroine, anyway, can you?" asked Wix cheerfully.

"She doesn't claim to be, yet for ten years she has been a heroine, after a fashion. With all her instincts drawing her one way, and without any strong fiber in her character, she's been a sacrifice to circumstances without striking a blow for freedom that would have been gained by another's pain." He looked away from Wix's cynical eyes as he murmured: "You see, we all have the angel within us, though with limitations to its soaring."

After a pause Wix lifted his *crème de menthe* and looked over it as he spoke:

"May I ask if you and this lady with the angel in her go hand-in-hand this week?"

Lawrence's eyes grew hard at the jest.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“ I’m going to open The Lawns for a week, and have Mrs. Dakon down there. Mrs. St. Leger will chaperon us.”

“ And I? ”

“ You’re not invited,” said Lawrence clearly.



## CHAPTER IV

MRS. DAKON opened her eyes and fixed them on the clock. It was half past nine. She turned on her arm and lay thinking. The windows were open, and from the ailantus trees came a birds' chorus with full orchestra. Sunlight stole through the green blinds and danced on early Dakon portraits where likenesses to Tony flashed out at her reproachfully. The house was barely and straitly furnished with Colonial mahogany, and as quiet as a vault.

She was so feverishly happy, so profoundly miserable. New York was a delight, a dream, an ecstasy, a place for bounding pulses, for life so keen it hurt. Bate's Crossing was a threat, a frown, a cloud on the horizon, bitter



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

dregs at the end of a delightful drink. She would not read her own heart. It held a truth she was not honest enough to face. She tried to forget what she had seen in Lawrence's eyes. It was something of which he would never speak.

One more week, and this life would be like a picture dissolved into shadow. She would look out on the prim street again, watch summer melt into autumn, and autumn into the desolation of a Pennsylvanian winter; the day's chapter would hold mush, bacon, gingerbread, church-bells, Hannah, Tony's departure for the factory in the morning and his coming home at night. She pressed her face against her nainsook sleeve and a passionate sadness went over her. Poor Tony! She did not love him, but she pitied him and felt a desire to be loyal to him. These two sentiments would send her back to the stagnation that made her wear a stony face to hide a sick heart. She was sorry for her husband. Life had used him badly. There was no prospect



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

of escape for him in the future, either. No money would ever come to lift them out of the slough. There was only Aunt Abby left, and her fortune was in trust; having been received from her mother's family, it would revert to it on her death. He was doomed to a treadmill through poverty, and, because she was his wife, she was doomed to bear the shackles and tramp beside him.

She sighed, and sat up among the pillows. There was no way of summoning a servant. Her room was on the top floor, and Aunt Abby did not believe in bells in the bedchambers. They were too luxurious to suit her notions. If you were "up and doing," you did not need a bell.

After a cold bath in a room two floors lower down, Nora crept into bed again. If only some good fairy would appear with her coffee now, instead of her having to dress and go down to the dining-room for it. Certainly Aunt Abby's stern ideas of what was correct was the only jarring note in her visit. She



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

was rising with a pout, when the door opened softly and Ruth appeared, carrying a tray with difficulty.

“You darling!” her mother exclaimed. “Strawberries, toast, coffee—m’m! Mother’s brick—that’s what you are, Ruth.”

“Hush,” said Ruth warningly. “Speak easy. Aunt Abby has been looking this way ever since breakfast.” And she drew her lips down sourly in a way that made her mother laugh with delight. “If she knew I’d brought up your breakfast, Noddy, she wouldn’t like it a scrap.”

“Mum’s the word, then, dearie,” and Mrs. Dakon put her teeth into a big, tempting strawberry. “Any letters?”

A cloud passed over Ruth’s face. The look was more mature than any that crossed her mother’s. She drew one from behind her frilled apron-bib.

“One for me, from father.”

“None for me?”

“He says it isn’t much use writing to you,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

as you don't answer," said Ruth, opening the sheet.

"Why, I wrote to him a day or two ago."

"Wasn't it on Monday, Noddy?"

"Well, perhaps it was," she admitted.

"To-day is Friday."

She read her letter aloud very slowly. It was of the parental variety to the child. He hoped they were having a good time, but he would be glad when they came back. He missed his Ruth so much. Tell mama she did not answer his letters. There was no news. It was very hot in the factory, but the porch at night was cool, and Hannah took good care of him. They would be home in nine days more. A few conundrums and puzzles cut from the village paper were enclosed, and he was her loving father.

"I must write to-day," said Mrs. Dakon, her brow puckered.

Ruth leaned against the bed and watched her while she ate. When her mother looked at



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

her she was surprised to see the tears stealing down her cheeks.

“Ruth, what’s the matter?” Mrs. Dakon said, startled, for she cried seldom.

“I want father,” she said very softly.

“But, dearie, we go back very soon.”

“I want him now. I want to go home.”

She began to sob passionately, and Mrs. Dakon drew her to her. She must be silenced. If Aunt Abby overheard, she would use it as an argument to hurry her back to Bate’s Crossing. Aunt Abby did not believe in wives and husbands taking holidays apart. In her opinion, both were apt to get into mischief.

“Hush, dear. Don’t let Aunt Abby hear. She’ll be so cross with poor Noddy. There, that’s better. Why, what’s the matter with my dearie? Tell Noddy.”

“Don’t you think father wants us back?” Ruth said, controlling her sobs. “Don’t you think he must feel awful sad when nobody’s home? Why does father look so sad, Noddy? Mr. Brundage doesn’t look that way, nor any



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

of the men who walk so fast on Fifth Avenue. But father does," she said, with sympathetic, wondering eyes.

"Poor father has to work so hard, dear. That's it. But we'll go back in one more week."

"I want to go back now. I want to play old maid with him," she said longingly. "Can't we go to-day, please, Noddy?"

Mrs. Dakon pushed away the coffee. Her eyes were bright and desperate. She must enroll Ruth on her side, for the child's reasoning could be reached and her partizanship gained.

"See here, darling, look at Noddy," she said tenderly, with emphasis, and, as Ruth's glowing, greenish eyes gazed wistfully at her, she continued rapidly: "You love me as well as father, don't you?"

Ruth nodded vigorously, put her arms tight about her, and gave her a fierce kiss.

"Then you will think of poor Noddy a little, too. See here, Ruth, Noddy is not happy



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

in Bate's Crossing. It's such a dull little place. Oh, she's enjoying this visit to New York so much. It costs a good deal of money, darling, to go about and see things, and we're poor, Ruth. Perhaps Noddy can never have this pleasure again, so her little darling brick of a love won't cry to go home till the visit's over in one week more. She'll do this for Noddy, won't she?"

The promise was given, and, with a mind at peace, Mrs. Dakon began to dress. Though her trunk was ready, she had as yet said nothing to Miss Dakon of the visit to Lawrence's country house.

"She'll give me the bow-wows soon enough," she thought, as she curled her hair, unconsciously employing a word she had caught from Lawrence. "Intolerable old maid! She hates for me to enjoy myself."

When she went down, an hour before luncheon, Miss Dakon was knitting by the back parlor window, the needles darting like small electric flashes between her slim fingers.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“ Good morning, Nora,” she said in words, while the tone conveyed: “ I don’t approve of you at all. You’re a very vain, very idle, very light-minded person, and I’d like very much to box your ears.”

“ Good morning, auntie,” said Mrs. Dakon, with unconcerned sweetness, savoring of defiance.

She sat down in a deep chair, a picture of spring in a blue-and-white dimity morning frock, her arms bare to the elbow and crossed behind her head. She knew that Miss Dakon thought the gown unsuitable for a married woman, and that the bare arms were nearly immoral; but these views were trivial beside the battle of opinions she knew was imminent. She plunged into the breach at once.

“ Have you ever heard of Mr. Brundage’s country place, The Lawns, Aunt Abby?” she asked in a cooing voice.

“ Who hasn’t? It’s one of those big show places written up in the papers, and open for about two months of the year. I’ve no pa-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

tience with men of his stamp. He's worth millions and millions; he's over thirty, and single still; he has houses everywhere, a yacht, private cars—degrading luxury—for he hasn't a serious thought, not a responsibility. Selfish, sinful to the core. Why doesn't he marry? What of his private life? Ugh! ugh! Don't speak of it."

"I'm not. I'm speaking of The Lawns," said Mrs. Dakon, drawing a loose, shining hair through her fingers.

"Well, what about it?"

"We're going down there to-day, to stay a week."

Grimness pinched every wrinkle on Miss Dakon's face, and she flung her head up like a war-horse.

"Does Anthony know of this?"

"I haven't mentioned it. I shall when I write to-day."

There was silence. Miss Dakon tried to be scathingly quiet, but she was too curious.

"Who's going? I take it you're not going



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

alone with Lawrence Brundage. Or are you? Perhaps it's become fashionable for a married woman to go to a bachelor's country house by herself. You see, I'm old-fashioned," said Miss Dakon, with angry eyes, "and perhaps I don't know what's usual in these days."

"He's asking some others, of course," said Nora placidly. "I don't know any of them. I remember, however, his speaking of Mrs. St. Leger."

"That woman!" and Miss Dakon's gaze flew to the prism-laden chandelier. "Well, I might have expected it."

"What's the matter with her?"

"Haven't you read the New York papers during the last two years?"

"Oh, yes, I've read of her. But I don't understand your scorn," said Nora with unruffled impudence.

"She's been divorced—twice. Her last husband is a divorced man. Both the others are married and are now among her—friends,"



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

said Miss Dakon in still, small tones of unalloyed disgust.

“She got the divorce—I mean divorces—for all sorts of awful things. Well, under the circumstances, I think in being friendly with her ex-husbands she has shown a very forgiving disposition.”

“Nora!” cried Miss Dakon, starting to the edge of her chair, “you are doing this to provoke me. You think such flippancy clever. I call it outrageous.”

“Why do we argue, Aunt Abby?” Nora laughed. “You have the tastes of an early Christian martyr and believe in mortifying the flesh. I long for happiness, and will snatch every fragment that comes my way. Going to The Lawns is one of the fragments. It won’t matter to me personally if Mrs. St. Leger has had six husbands instead of three. We must take people as we find them. If they keep out of prison, it’s all we ought to ask of them.”

Miss Dakon’s eyes gleamed with hate.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“I’ve been watching you. You’re one of these women who take color from the people you are among. A man like Lawrence Brundage dancing attendance on you morning, noon, and night—and far into the night—has done you no good. You’ve caught the jargon of the crowd of society to which he belongs. You were a foolish woman, very vain of your looks, when you came here. I begin to believe you’ll end by being—fast.” Miss Dakon stood up. “I don’t suppose it’s any use asking you to give up this visit and keep away from that St. Leger woman and all her tribe?”

“Quite useless,” said Nora, the antagonism no longer veiled.

“Even if you got a telegram from Anthony summoning you back?”

“You’ve been writing to him, have you?” she asked. “Yes, I see you have. Then you might as well know, if twenty telegrams came, I’d go to The Lawns——”

“And to the devil!” snapped Miss Dakon.

“Just the same,” Nora continued serenely,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

but her face was very pale as she went to the door.

“Very well,” and Miss Dakon cleared her throat; “I’ll say no more about it. But, as a favor, I wish you’d leave Ruth with me. You won’t miss her, and I’d like to take her to the Rutherfords at West Point to see the commencement exercises.”

Nora hesitated, then a reckless desire for absolute freedom from every visible tie to her life at Bate’s Crossing swept through her.

“I’ve no objection, if she wants to go,” she said, and left the room.



## CHAPTER V

IT rained obligingly that afternoon, and Mrs. Dakon had the felicity of wearing her new tan-colored rain-coat. She was conscious of looking very smart as she drove in a hansom to Long Island City, where Lawrence's special car waited for the party to The Lawns.

She looked at the glistening streets, the slab-sided tenement houses near the East River front, without really seeing them. The face of Lawrence Brundage was before her, its endearing smile and lazy eyes. Excitement had worked a miracle in her blood. It seemed riding her heart in a struggle to win a race. Ordinarily her mind was not one to which allegory occurred readily, but she had a nervous feeling that the red-nosed driver stood for



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Fate, and that he was carrying her to her destination past unheeded danger-signs.

When Lawrence came toward her in the station and gave her trunk check and satchel to his servant, the long look he bent on her was enough. The tension that had clasped her snapped. She felt content to drift, and flung the reins to happiness.

"We are seven," he said, when later he presented her to the others.

An Irishman named Lawless, whom the others called "Micky," sat next Mrs. St. Leger. His hair was very black, teeth very white, and eyes defiantly blue. His last name suited him, for Micky's air conveyed that he would rather enjoy smashing laws than otherwise. Mrs. St. Leger had a bull-terrier in leash, and she was disputing with Micky about a song. Each was singing it softly after a fixed idea, to the slaughter of harmony.

Nora looked at this doubly divorced and trebly married woman with interest. She was a handsome brunette, plump and frankly



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

forty. When she smiled she was prettier. It was evident that nothing could weigh her down. She would slip from any care as easily as she had slipped from the matrimonial harness when it grew irritating.

The other three were Miss Peggy Drake, a tall, square-shouldered, clear-featured blonde of thirty; a man that looked a little like Paderewski, and a lean, tanned Englishman, with a drawl and a monocle, who suggested fresh air and underdone beef.

“I must tell you about Peggy,” said Lawrence, when he had made Nora comfortable and proceeded to cut the leaves of a magazine which she had no intention of reading. “She’s a ripping good sort. Men love her. I always provide at least two for her for her different moods. She’s neither a Bohemian nor a Philistine. She puzzles one and amazes the other. Now Johnny Todd, the fellow with the musical hair, thinks he can write—God help us!—as Micky says. He loves fire-lit corners, twilight, and a good pair of ears.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

He generally reads his own stuff. There are times when a man of that sort amuses Peggy, but she steers him away from his own paragraphs to reading Béranger or George Moore without his knowing he's been shelved. Then, at other times, she's the best chum a really manny fellow can have. She'll ride like the deuce all day and come back mud to her neck, sit up to venison, Burgundy, and that sort of thing, play a ripping game of billiards, bluff like a man at poker, and has horse and dog talk perfect. For that mood I've asked Sir Peter Gore. She's just his sort."

"Do you think it dreadful of Mrs. St. Leger to have been divorced and married so much?"

"It's a bad habit," Lawrence smiled, "but I, who never felt a tether, am not one to give an opinion. One thing must be said for Pussy," he added, "she did her best to make matrimony successful. Her partners were awful blackguards. She had patience up to a certain point, then over it went. You see,



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

she felt she was put here to have a fair share of human content, and the rôle of reformer to drunkards and Don Juans didn't appeal to her."

"If she loved them she must have suffered, but she doesn't look as if she'd ever shed a tear."

"She couldn't love that way," said Lawrence softly, and with a glance that added: "Not as you could, you dear little woman."

"Tell me about Mr. Lawless," said Nora hurriedly, for the look had set her tingling.

"Micky? Oh, he just is, that's all. He's what one would call 'willing and obliging.' If the cook gave notice, Micky could cook a dinner deliciously. If somebody fell ill at the last moment when theatricals were on, Micky could step in and play *Juliet* and bear off all the laurels. He could head a drunken college riot, and preach a lecture on temperance to make the W. C. T. U. knit slippers for him. We've classified all now but our two selves," said Lawrence, leaning nearer and speaking



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

with sudden softness. "How shall we be described?"

"Oh, we can't see ourselves as others see us," she said evasively.

"As others see us we are not complex riddles at all, I dare say. But we know, don't we, that it would have been a good thing if Tony's letter had reached my house when I was on *The Sea-Bird*, half-way to England?"

He said the words in a bitter, distracted murmur, and went away from her to Mrs. St. Leger. Micky took his place.

When they reached The Lawns, blazing logs in the big hall and tea awaited them.

"By 'tea,'" said Lawrence, "read anything you want. We'd better all take whisky-and-soda after this damp drive."

When he came upon Nora with a cup of chocolate and thin bread and butter, he objected.

"You look pale. Take some Scotch."

"I never touch whisky, as you know. It



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

goes to my head," she said, without meeting his eyes.

"That's why you've a complexion instead of a skin," said Mrs. St. Leger, looking at the pale amber fizzling in her own glass. "It's not that I like beauty less, but that I like high-balls more."

"Isn't she a veritable Bo-peep in style?" Todd whispered, his eyes fixed on Nora.

"And she has a daughter of ten or so. Think of it! Probably, too, she doesn't know there's such a thing as face massage in the world. But I can explain those baby contours and peach-blossom coloring. Johnny, that woman hasn't lived yet. She isn't even awake! All the doctors are wrong. A life of stagnation is the best preserver of beauty."

After dinner Micky sang gloriously. Even Mrs. St. Leger, with a heart like seasoned leather, could not but feel there was something in life of which she knew nothing when those tenor notes breathed with a tenderness like tears, "She is far from the land where her



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

young hero sleeps." His voice made love to a roomful.

Later they killed an hour with roulette, and the women went to their rooms by eleven. Lawrence had avoided even a momentary *tête-à-tête* with Nora, but when she stood before the shield-shaped mirror in her room pulling out her hairpins absently, she was conscious of a new feeling, a happiness with guilt in it.

The words Lawrence had spoken in the train were the first that told her of love for herself and an unwilling disloyalty to Tony. He should not have said them. Having heard them, she should now regret that the mask of friendship had fallen. But instead, she was frightened at the desperate joy that mastered her. She had never supposed she could be a wicked woman, but she must be, for she was glowing and rejoicing in what she knew was wrong.

As she lay awake in the silence, a story she had read somewhere occurred to her, of a man



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

led to die on a roadside gibbet, who stopped to pick a rose upon the way. Bate's Crossing was her punishment, and if she took back for memory the red, wild flower of Lawrence's love, what harm was there in it, after all?



## CHAPTER VI

“GOOD morning, Bo-peep. So you affect fresh air and early dews with all the other virtues, do you?”

Mrs. Dakon stood still in the park avenue where the pale sun struggled to live and the trees dripped, and waited for Mrs. St. Leger, who, with her hands in a pea-jacket and a bull-terrier at her heels, was striding toward her.

“I couldn’t sleep, and thought a walk would take the cobwebs out of my brain,” said Nora, as they went on together.

“Why couldn’t you sleep?” Mrs. St. Leger gave her a sharp glance and the fresh color poured over her face.

“Partly because,” she said wistfully, “this week ends so much that’s delightful.”

“Larry Brundage was telling me about



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

you. Must you go back to that horrid little town? Why not make your husband come to New York?"

"He can't. He's sure of a competence there, and something better in the future. His niche is there."

"But perhaps yours isn't."

"Oh, yes," she said in a colorless voice, "it is."

"Lost his money, etc., failed, and all the rest—sad," said Mrs. St. Leger, striding on with her face up to the mist. "I dare say I'm a pig, but I'd get away if I were you. You see, this one life means so much to me, I hate even to lose the early morning lying in bed. I believe in making all the investments Nature has given me pay well, and I'm fair enough not to keep anybody else out of his profits. Now, here's the way I look at things: A man has no business to fail. When his ship has sprung a leak, it's generally due to mismanagement or conceit, and it's a foolish woman who helps him plug up the holes and



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

tries being comfortable with him on the wreck. Wrecks are cold, my dear, and they don't have any modern conveniences. I'd advise her to select a good life-preserver and leap overboard, trusting to being picked up by a spanking yacht with a good-looking owner."

Nora moved from her a little, dislike in her gaze.

"A man wouldn't treat a wife that way," she said hotly.

Mrs. St. Leger burst into a ringing laugh. She stood still and apostrophized the trees.

"Wouldn't he? Oh, hear her, hear her! Is there anything more absolutely new-born than this person beside me in a tan coat? My dear," she said, turning sharply, "men make women abide by their mistakes. If a wife drinks, she's called a dipsomaniac and clapped into a sanitarium. The clubs would be pretty empty if unhappy wives did that. How many men go into voluntary exile in Siberia with convict wives? Ever heard of one? Women do it every year. It's time we slew these ready



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

sympathies and took a few lessons from men."

"You have no illusions," said Nora.

"Bother illusions! They're cheats," she said, shivering her chubby shoulders. "They hold out promises they never fulfil. You'll never be really comfy till you've stuck a pin in each one and left it squirming. Now let's get in to coffee. This mental exercise has given me an appetite." She slipped her arm through Nora's and laughed: "You poor baby, though you have a daughter, you're not grown up at all. I wonder what you'll do when you get your understanding?"

As that day passed, and the next, Nora saw that the rest of the party kept apart from her and Lawrence. They were left outside a circle; *tête-à-têtes* were forced upon them. The knowledge made her nervous. She was like a child stealing a sweet she was afraid to taste. Lawrence perplexed her, too. He looked pale, almost surly. He was given to long silences, smoked a great deal, and at



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

times dared to give her a long gaze eloquent with a burning declaration that set her pulses quivering like imprisoned birds. Sometimes during half an hour spent alone they did not exchange a word.

On the third afternoon verging on dusk, he drove her home from the country club, where a pigeon-match had drawn a crowd. Micky was riding with Peggy Drake just ahead, and his sweet, tenor tones came back to them along the blossoming ways:

“Your hands to-day are not here,  
Yet lay them, love, in my hands.  
The hour-glass sheds its sands  
All day for the dead hours’ bier;  
But now, as two hearts draw near,  
This hour, like a flower, expands—  
Oh, love, your hands in my hands.”

“Do you know the rest of that song?” Lawrence asked suddenly, and reined in the horses till they almost stopped, Micky’s voice growing fainter and fainter.

The dusk made a cloak for them and folded



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

them together. Fragrance from damp, opening flowers swept their faces. There was an intimate silence which seemed waiting for words heavy with fatality.

“Your eyes are afar to-day—  
Yet love, look now in mine eyes.  
Two hearts sent forth may despise  
All dead things by the way.  
All between is decay,  
Dead hours and this hour that dies.  
Oh, love, look deep in mine eyes.”

The words were spoken slowly, almost in a whisper, and he sighed. He felt miserable. He had never in his life denied himself whatever seemed good unto him. For the first time, Honor stood at the beginning of the path he longed to journey upon and held up a forbidding hand.

“Why did you come here? Why did I ever see you?” he said, and drew a long breath of passionate resignation.

Nora's head drooped, and sadness rushed over her. The inevitableness of their parting



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

was never clearer, Bate's Crossing never more ominous. She shivered, and shook her head. He continued looking at her with those miserable eyes, but did not touch her tightly folded hands.

"It's a wretched thing altogether," he said softly. "You've knit yourself into my life, and, when you go back——"

"Don't speak like this," she said, and he saw tears flooding her eyes. "It hurts so."

"Let's be frank for once," he said defiantly; "tell the truth, and then take cheerless virtue as a tonic for our souls. Listen, then. You'll go your way, and I mine, very soon. But I'll never forget you, and I'll never see you again. My ailment will require heroic treatment. Good-by will mean good-by."

The tears were now dropping on her hands. He went on without pity.

"Tony should have come with you. I blame him for that. Had he come, we wouldn't have known each other in this delightful, intimate way. You wouldn't have become a tempta-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

tion, a necessity. However, it's over now. I've conquered myself. For me, the wide world, with your eyes haunting me; for you, Bate's Crossing and peace."

"No, never peace," she murmured, with a sob. "Oh, never peace again!"

He touched the horses with the whip, and the drive was continued in silence. A groom came across the lawn and stood by the horses' heads when the big, arched portico at The Lawns was reached. In the shadow, Lawrence lifted Nora down, and, for a second, his arms closed around her in longing. When they entered the big hall, bright with lamp-light, both were pale.

Mrs. St. Leger was talking in her usual fashion with Peggy Drake, and after Lawrence's passionate renunciation, her words had the ring of brass in Nora's ears.

"Who sets the fashions? Who makes fads? We, my dear, we, the women who are married, more or less."

"Still, I'm afraid of marriage. It's a horse



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

that's always handicapped too heavily to win. The odds are all against it," said Peggy, who looked very handsome, as she lounged in her riding-clothes.

"You're foolish to scratch it, Peggy. If it fails in one race, it wins in another. If you lose in a steeplechase, my dear, change around and try it on the flat. I've done it, and I'm going very nicely, thanks. Bo-peep," she rambled on, "what have you been doing to Larry? He looks like a monk that has just renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil."

"No, I haven't cut your acquaintance yet," said Lawrence, as he lit a cigar.

That night, after twelve o'clock, Nora stole away from the rest to her room. Peggy, Sir Peter Gore, Micky, and Mrs. St. Leger were playing baccarat; she had last seen Lawrence with Todd in the library. She left without saying good night to any one. When she reached the top of the stairs, Lawrence stepped from the shadow and took her in his arms.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"I love you," he said, and kissed her till her brain swam. "I am mad to say it. You are mad to let me. But, oh! I love you, I love you, Nora, and I can't give you up."

"No, no, no," she sobbed in joyous terror, broke from him, and ran to her room.

Once there, she stood like a wild creature, trapped. Fear and self-knowledge shook her. She loved Lawrence Brundage so that any madness might become reasonable. She dared not stay near him. She loved him. She must go away, now, before it was too late. She loved him. She must put away all thoughts of him and remember what was true and right, Tony who trusted her, Ruth who needed her. Oh, she loved him, loved him! Dazzled, grief-stricken, remorseful, thirsting for the love she put away, hating the sacrifice she must make, she knelt by her bed and sobbed hours away. In the morning Lawrence's man brought him a note from her:

"I'm leaving on the six o'clock train. You can have my trunk sent after me to Bate's Crossing. Say a tele-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

gram called me home. Good-by. I am not heartless, like Mrs. St. Leger, nor wise, like Peggy Drake, and I'm old-fashioned enough to hate deceit. I'm going home to Tony. You wish we had not met. I wish it, too."

He set his teeth as he tore it up. There was a new look, a hard one, on his face.



## CHAPTER VII

AMAZING transgressions that shatter lives are never the result of a plunge. The end is gained step by step, timidly, haltingly, with fascinated eyes that peer into the darkness, many a look back, many a thrill of fear. By the time the feet have reached the lowest ledge, expectancy has familiarized the place. What seemed an abyss, is a valley of wonderful beauty. The fruit hangs low and shining. The river on which we are to embark runs madly, and is said to ripple through entrancing scenes farther on, when the shadow cast by the mountain is left behind. There is no regret for the hills of peace, nor the sleepy fields, far above, where stolid toilers work and know nothing of the fever of life, which is to be so ravishing, so sweet.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

One day, late in July, Nora Dakon was waiting in a wood not far from her home. Lawrence, who the day before had come to lodge in the next village under an assumed name, was to ride that way, and she was waiting for him. Since the morning when she hurried from The Lawns at dawn, much had happened. His pursuit of her had been relentless. That act had been a whip to his desire, and had changed him from a half-hearted sinner, beset by scruples, into a determined one.

She had not seen him, but many letters had been exchanged between them. Every tactic, every influence and artifice known to Lawrence from a varied experience in romantic adventures, had been used unsparingly in those burning lines. Nora tried to resist, while she continued to invite them, knew sleepless nights which had made her thinner, had suffered anguish of mind and body, for it hurt her to contemplate being cruel, and now, after two months, she had come to one decision: she would rather have one month of life with Law-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

rence with death at the end of it, than all the sweets the future could crowd into long years without him. She had come to be clay in his hands. She felt an adoration so overwhelming it terrified her. It was her impulse to obliterate herself and be a part of him, an echo of him, to sacrifice herself for him—anything—to express how fully he was life and light and being to her.

Women who fling themselves to this sort of self-crucifixion are generally of Mrs. Dakon's caliber. They are not clever enough to know that man is a contrary animal and would rather live with a termagant than a martyr. The resigned shoulders bent obligingly for his blows he can scornfully forget, but two pretty fingers snapped under his nose make him wink and remember.

The final question had been written by Lawrence:

“Will you give up everything and go away with me? Do you love me well enough for that?”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Yes, even for that,” she had answered.

To-day he was coming to make the final arrangements. Soon this life would be cast behind, and she would be his forever. It had to be.

Her handkerchief tied to a tree was the signal to him where to find her. After a feverish ten minutes of waiting she heard him speaking to his horse as he tied him, before he came through the green gloom to her side. She sank trembling into his arms, and her thin face, her wild eyes, sent pity through him. This tremendous infatuation meant a great deal to him, since he was going to fling his defiance to the world, which would either flay him as a villain or give him a shrug as a fool. But the first sight of Nora told him it meant a fearful thing to her.

“You frighten me, Nora,” he said, as they sat down on a fallen tree, their hands clasped. “I’m tearing up your life by the roots. Are you afraid, dear? Do you hesitate?”

Her smile was one of amaze.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“I got past all that long ago—past even having the thought of leaving Ruth hurt me. I’ve come to feel a solace in knowing that she will help comfort Tony.” The tone was matter-of-fact. “I can’t stay long, dear. It’s dangerous. We might be seen. But, oh, it’s good to see you! Tell me what I’m to do, and when.”

They parted a few moments later. He rode down the road and paused. When she reached a turning, she looked back. They waved good-by to each other.

Lawrence’s yacht, *The Sea-Bird*, was to lie in Boston harbor in three days with stores aboard for a long cruise. Mrs. Dakon was to go to an old school friend there, ostensibly to inquire about a boarding-school for Ruth. She was to go aboard *The Sea-Bird* at night. The anchor would be lifted, and she would steam away to a future purchased at considerable cost.

Our best-laid plans are only bubbles fashioned for sunlight. An untoward breath, and



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

they are gone. On the eve of Mrs. Dakon's departure her husband killed himself.

She had gone for a long walk with Ruth that afternoon, during which she had stopped many times in quiet paths and kissed the child passionately, telling her, no matter what happened, to remember always that Noddy had loved her. Ruth's delighted but careless responses had made her know a momentary horror of herself, but the feeling had been wiped out in the rush of sacrificial worship which the thought of Lawrence called up.

Hannah met them at the door. Her stupid face was gray and twitching.

"Something's happened to Mr. Dakon," she said hoarsely.

"What do you mean?" asked Nora, searching the woman's awful face. She pushed Ruth back on the piazza, and closed the door.

"He—he—came home an hour ago," Hannah said with difficulty. "I thought he looked ter'ble bad as he came up the path. I rushed up to the hall. 'You're sick, Mr. Dakon,' I



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

says. ‘Yes, Hannah,’ he says; ‘my head is simply racked with pain. I couldn’t stand the factory any longer. Get me a powder,’ he says, ‘an’ I’ll lie down.’ Oh, he did look bad—so white, his forehead all puckered as ef the light was hurtin’ him. My heart jest ached fer him——”

“Go on,” said Nora wildly, as the woman stopped to whimper, her eyes frightened.

“There was a letter on the dinin’-room table, an’ he took it up as he passed to the libr’y——”

“What letter? What letter?” Her lips were dry and stiff.

“It hadn’t no name on it—jest to this street and number it was. It had a yeller post-office envelope on it—dead letter, it said. I noticed it most particular because I had one back oncet, when I forgot to put on my sister’s address right, an’ they opened my letter to—to find out where to send it back——”

A monstrous fear had come into Nora’s eyes. She sat down on the hall chair.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Well, m’m, I wuz so anxious to git the phenac’tine, in my hurry I couldn’t find it for a long time among all the bottles, but at last I did, an’ I went up. I wuz jest goin’ to knock at the door, when, oh, m’m, I heard a sound that wuz awful—kinder a moan or a sob—seemed as if it come from a broken heart. It jest went though me like a knife, an’ I’ll never fergit that sound. When I knocked, there wasn’t no answer, so I opened the door, an’, oh, m’m—Mrs. Dakon, m’m—he wuz lyin’ against the desk in a heap like.” Her wide, pale mouth grew flaccid. “There wuz somethin’ in his hand. I didn’t hear any shot—but, oh, when I see what it wuz——”

Ruth had commenced to beat on the door.

“I want to see father. Let me in. I want to see him!” she shrieked.

“Keep Ruth out,” said Nora, forcing her voice. “Stay with her.”

It seemed as if she would never reach the room. Her feet were weighted. The air was crimson before her rigid eyes. When she



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

saw Anthony, his head fallen sideways, his shoulders hunched under the serge coat, the numbness passed. She shook in every limb, whispering:

“Oh! oh! oh!”

He was dead. The silence around him proclaimed it. But the enormity of it did not reach her then. Her mind groped for the reason for the act. That letter—she must see it. This was not her fault. It could not be—it must not be her fault. *That letter!* He knew nothing—he could not have known. She must be clear of this. She must settle that fact first with herself before her mind had room for another thought. *That letter!*

Without looking at his face, she moved around him, as if afraid of disturbing a sleeper, and searched rapidly, her eyes rapacious. It seemed as if she were not breathing until she should be cleared. She put her fingers into his pockets, and when from the one on the left side of his coat she drew them, wet and red, she only wiped them stupidly on



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

her skirt, as she turned from him and swept the room with her wild, darting gaze.

She flew to the hearth. There was some charred paper there which rustled like dry leaves at her touch. Deep in it, like the core of an uncanny fruit, a few pieces were left. They were morsels of her own gray-blue paper, her own writing on them.

“Never regret,” was on one; “before I loved you, and—” was on another; “days on the Mediterranean—” was on a third; “such happiness, Larry,” was on the last. He had found out all, the very worst. She recognized this letter as one in which her coming days with Lawrence on *The Sea-Bird* had been ecstatically dwelt upon.

With these fragments in her hands, she looked for the first time at her husband's face. Had Mrs. Dakon possessed a quick imagination and been familiar with Roman history, it might have occurred to her that another dead face must have worn the same look a long time ago—amazement, heart-break, and re-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

proach, as if the lips still said, "And thou, too, Brutus?"

A physical terror came down upon her. She shrieked, and flung the door open.



## CHAPTER VIII

THE funeral was over. Ruth at times broke into passionate cries and demands for her father to come back. But the thin, imploring wail which she had uttered while she haunted the coffin and watched his sculptured face, "Don't put father in the ground. I don't want him put in the ground. Oh, please don't put him in the ground!" no longer tortured her mother.

The house was a horror to Mrs. Dakon. Although nervously ill, she spent the time in the sunshine, walking up one road and down another, her hands clutched. She was stupefied by this blow, which had struck the reins of her life from her hands. The thought of the letter which had turned her husband's weariness to a conquering despair dogged her like



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

a specter. Tremblings passed over her; she struggled in a profound soul-sickness.

At first she had a feeling that by never thinking of Lawrence she was, in a sense, making reparation. Indeed, the thought of him meant helplessness, panic. But as the dull weeks crept by, a narcotic was in some way generated from the medley of suffering. She found herself speculating on what life would be like when she had gone from Bate's Crossing and they met face to face. In Tony's death there was, instead of acute, personal loss, a feeling of horror and remorse, and this, each day that passed, subtly blunted. She really loved Lawrence Brundage, and love for a living man is bound to subjugate pity for a dead man. The worst had happened, and the natural rebound was toward happiness.

On the night of the tragedy Nora had written Lawrence an hysterical account of the suicide, concealing nothing. The next day a telegram of comfort, followed by a short, self-reproachful, tender letter, had come from him.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

That was all, and now Anthony had been dead five weeks. Miss Dakon, who had come on for the funeral, had continued with Nora, and they were busy preparing to return to New York together. The furniture was to be sold at auction, and she was to begin a new phase of life, with about seventeen thousand dollars as her capital.

She often sat alone and dreamed about the future. The coming months unrolled themselves before her. Lawrence and she would be circumspect and patient. There would be a year of their lives offered up as a sacrifice to conventionality, and then—the future together, the wide world before them. Poor Anthony had been dealt a secret, mortal blow, and nothing could ever change that fact, or wholly wipe out its corroding bitterness, but in all other respects her marriage to Lawrence would be a wise and fortunate thing. The world would think she had the greatest luck. She would flash into social fame for having won such a *parti* from his determined bachelor-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

hood. Her marriage would open a brilliant future for Ruth. She would be so good to the poor. Tears, like those of a repentant child, streamed down her face. She would be so good to all that suffered—yes, and to all that had sinned. In these days, looking spiritual and grave-eyed in her black clothes, she was sensitive, emotional, and knew a deep tenderness, never understood before, for all that had made mistakes. Perhaps God would forgive her the wreck of one life if she saved many.

While indulging in this self-communion, she began to look for a letter from Lawrence. She appreciated the delicacy that had kept him mute and non-intrusive; but as the desire for happiness grew, the longing to see him kept pace with it. When she could bear the silence no longer, she sent him a few lines, asking him to write, and saying she would soon be in New York.

This was forwarded to Lawrence in Newport. He read it, crushed it in his pocket, and



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

went to dinner at Mrs. St. Leger's. The meal was a torture. He prepared to leave at the earliest possible moment.

"I've never known you really dull before, Larry," said his hostess, as he strolled up to her on the piazza to say good night, while the rest were still idling over liqueurs. "I've known you bored, perverse, but never stupid. You're not looking well, either. What's the row?"

"A headache. Nothing more interesting."

"That's contrary to human geography." She raised her brows and cigarette at the same time.

"I'm afraid I *am* dull. Enlighten me."

"Why, the aches of love are popularly supposed to affect the heart." She made a distinct pause, and added clearly: "I should think Bo-peep would make a dear little morsel of a widow. This may seem irrelevant, but it's not."

Lawrence's boredom grew deeper at these words, and he showed it.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Such tangential flights are too maddening for a man with a headache to follow. Good night.”

She held his fingers for a moment and looked at him shrewdly.

“How well I read the signs in you, Larry.”

“Still I don’t understand.”

“I could give expert prophecy that you are not going to contradict your sex. Poor Bo-peep!”

“Don’t you think, Pussy, you’re a bit interfering?” he said, paling.

“No, a bit daring, that’s all. I’ve pulled a little of the guilt off the gingerbread of your intentions, Larry. Without the trimming it’s a nauseous little morsel, and poor Bo-peep will cry when she tastes the horrid stuff.”

“When you finish with metaphor——”

“Oh, would you rather? Well, here goes. I took a great fancy to that foolish little Bo-peep. When she gets hurt, she’ll go all to pieces. I’m sorry for her, for I can see you



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

mean to throw her over. That's all, Larry, and we're good friends just the same. These things are part of life. Poor little thing!"

He walked home, making a new acquaintance with himself. Instead of joining Wix, who was in the dining-room with some men, he went to a seat in the garden at the back, from which the starlit sea could be seen, a sparkling, heaving, sighing companion for his mood. Pussy St. Leger's words had been brutal. He faced the idea that they might be true. He was aware now that from the moment Anthony's suicide had been made known to him, the sense of shock and remorse had been mixed with another feeling, an enlightenment that had hinted that Nora Dakon, free to be won and married, was different from the same woman when she was a torturing temptation for whom one might commit a superb, even scandalous, indiscretion. The pretty fruit that had hung high was not inviting when offered on a dish to be honestly selected before all men.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Truthfully, then, it had come to this: he was not in love with Nora Dakon. His infatuation had been the result of conditions which poor old Tony's suicide had changed completely. He told himself that even as Tony's wife, Nora and he would have known each other for a lifetime, probably, without a guilty thought, had he not met her in New York alone and pitied her first.

"A man's temptations are often a matter of environment," he decided, as he smoked, "and a woman's a matter of mood. If she hadn't hated going home, she wouldn't have fallen in love with me, I could swear."

Then Pussy St. Leger was right. He meant to "throw her over."

Pussy had a villainous tongue, an ugly way of saying things, and her own experiences had made her a scorching judge of men. He was not going to do anything a gentleman might be ashamed of, but he was not going to marry. He had made up his mind long ago he never would marry. Nothing could alter that. He



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

would, however, write to Nora—and keep away from her. Matters would gradually adjust themselves. She would find him a friend, a rare one. He was still so fond of her, poor little woman! He would make amends. He owed it to her for poor old Tony's sake to make big amends, and he would.

Still, that night he dreamed of her, of her soft eyes and pleading kisses, and awoke hating himself. A cold calculation of interests was impossible to him. He could be impulsively unjust and cruel without being base, just as good aspirations could sway him in passing without making him noble. One side of his nature shuddered at the silken cruelty that was now a determination. But he was not going to marry.

The summer passed. Nora went from town to Southampton with Miss Dakon and Ruth, from Southampton to the Adirondacks, from there back to the house in Fifty-seventh Street. These places had had no more substance to her than a dream. Her heart was starving.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Three evasive letters from Lawrence were all it had had to feed on. She read them many times every day, and her eyes grew to have a frightened look. She had tried to believe that when New York was reached again she would have what she craved—the sight of him, his voice, his touch. Her expression was feverish all day, exhausted and hopeless at night. He had not come to-day; that was a husk flung behind her, and she looked toward the morrow. The sound of the bell, a letter, a footstep, sent the color in wavering flashes into her thin face. She would go out hoping to meet him, and hurry home fearing to miss him, and, with all this eating torment in her soul, she had to be silent. There was no one to understand and help her. Nora divined that while Miss Dakon sheltered her, she was really her judge.

Miss Dakon was a shrewd woman, and she guessed the truth: Anthony's suicide lay at this woman's door. She was having her punishment now in the indifference of Lawrence



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Brundage, for whom she was longing as one desert-lost aches for water. The God of her understanding flayed his erring children just this way. It was right. Like so many good women whom the devil has never favored with a temptation, there was a trinity in her soul composed of Jesuit, Puritan, and the Mosaic Law. These three made a ring-a-rosy around Nora Dakon and found her abasement sweet.

“Ph’ff!” said Miss Dakon, one morning at breakfast, her face hidden by the newspaper. “Eight in the party, and most of them disreputable.”

Something in the tone made Nora listen for the next words.

“I should think they *would* like the East. Cairo, nautch-dancers, pagan temples, ought to suit that crew exactly. I wonder why the St. Leger creature was left out?”

“Let me see—who—what—” Nora faltered.

“Why, don’t you know? I thought Lawrence Brundage was such a friend of yours.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

He's taking a lot of his set away for a cruise on *The Sea-Bird*. They're to be gone all winter. Left yesterday."

Nora reached her room. She stared at herself in the glass. The panic one sees in the face of a lost child was written there. It seemed wonderful to her that she was not dead. She had heard these words and had not fallen or cried out. She could still live and breathe and think, while life was over. During two hours alone in her room she tried to understand really that Lawrence was gone. *Gone!* That meant that she was alone, forsaken, flung aside. She beat her hand against her mouth and paced the floor. Her brain felt strange. The truth slipped away, and she found herself thinking of the day in the wood, when he had kissed and comforted her and they had talked of their life together. She thought of the hot, dusty road where she had stood to wave good-by to him, and she knew that every one was deceived but her, that Lawrence was *not* gone. No, no—it was a



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

ruse to cheat the world, but principally to cheat Miss Dakon. . . .

“Here’s a letter for you. A man brought it, and wants your receipt for it,” said Miss Dakon, whose knock she had not heard. “What’s the matter with you?” she shrieked after the first glance at her. “You look awful. You’ve got a chill. You’re shaking. You’re like a sheet. I’ll get you something.”

Nora shut the door after her and opened Lawrence’s letter as well as she could. Her mouth and hands moved convulsively. The contents were not lengthy, and were to the effect that she must forget him. He was not worthy of her love; he was selfish, and she must forget him. It hurt him to do this, but Tony’s death had made a difference—and didn’t she understand? But he would be her friend as long as he lived. There were several paragraphs devoted to a description of this friendship. As practical proof of it, he would rescue her from the ugly trials of poverty. He wanted her to be comfortable and happy.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

He had instructed his lawyers to set aside a sum which would allow her, in quarterly payments, fifteen thousand dollars a year as long as she lived, the principal, on her death, to go to her daughter.

Nora flung the letter into her trunk, locked it, and had sufficient self-control to hide the key in a vase just before Miss Dakon came back with whisky, a servant following with several blankets.

“Drink it! You look awful! I’ve sent for the doctor! You’re like ice!” Miss Dakon’s hard voice ran on in rasping exclamations.

Nora subsided, allowed herself to be undressed like a baby and put to bed. Under the heap of blankets she shivered like a sick animal in a storm. Before fever folded her in flame, some conclusions punctured the maze of agonizing thought where she wandered like a thing astray. She would take Lawrence Brundage’s money and go to Paris with Ruth. . . . It was not a fine thing to do, but it was her only hope. . . . The



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

money—Paris—Ruth—far away from Miss Dakon. . . .

She turned on her pillow and fancied that Lawrence stood beside the bed, smiling at her. No, it was a lie. He was happy, gone, and she was here, dying, but hating him. Yes, she hated him. She felt a desire to hurt, to kill him. She wished that the yacht and all on board might sink. She was blind and deaf with rage, and, in a paroxysm of hatred, she slipped into delirium.



## CHAPTER IX

THREE days before Christmas Miss Dakon stood before her mirror, fastening a mourning brooch in her crêpe collar. Her lips were set; their pale color-line had quite disappeared. She looked grim, as she always did when facing her duty.

“Come,” she snapped when there was a knock at the door.

A middle-aged maid who had been long in her employ stepped in.

“The room is all ready for Mrs. Dakon, but I’m afraid—” and she paused doubtfully.

“What about?”

“I’m afraid, Miss Dakon, it’ll be awful cold. It’s too bad the heat don’t go up there, an’ maybe the flue’d smoke if we tried a fire.”

“Nonsense! No fire is necessary. The



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

door can be left open, and the heat from the hall will be quite enough."

"But coming from the South, an' Mrs. Dakon something of an invalid?" Ellen held up a hot-water bottle; "I'll have this good and hot for her, anyway, between the sheets."

"Oh, very well," said Miss Dakon in a tone of dismissal.

When Ellen was gone she stood frowning as she arranged her skirt. She was thinking that she was glad she had never coddled herself. Ellen's indulgent, motherly attitude toward Mrs. Dakon was quite different from her own. She had asked her to spend Christmas with her, not because she liked her, but because she had something very definite to say to her, and something very unpleasant to suggest. In her way she was rather enjoying herself.

Nora arrived shortly before six. At a glance Miss Dakon saw things that irritated her: she was well, and in good spirits; "the vials of wrath" consistent with Miss Dakon's creed had not been poured upon her auda-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

ciously poised head, or the head had not been aware of them. She had almost regained her beauty; her thinness had merged into a slender smoothness of outline, and in her clinging, black clothes she moved with a rippling grace. The wan stare that had been in her eyes during her convalescence, and before she left for North Carolina, was gone, and in its place were the smiling obstinacy, the masked resentment that Miss Dakon knew well.

"You've brought no trunks," said Miss Dakon as the cabman handed in only a large dressing-bag with mountings of dull silver.

"No," said Nora; "I thought I'd leave my trunks at the station. You see, I have three."

She trailed her soft, chiffon-trimmed skirts into the drawing-room and tried to loll in the stiff sofa as she pulled off her long gloves with an air of fatigue. She was so exquisite, her travel-weariness suggested a soiled, thirsty flower. Miss Dakon in harsh crêpe and rigid cashmere sat opposite her.

"I asked you for the holidays, and you come



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

with your bag," Miss Dakon said in a flat, attenuated voice.

"But I felt you'd been too impulsive, Aunt Abby," Nora sighed. "Let's have a good, long talk, and after that we'll know just what we want to do—won't we?"

"Are you hungry?" Miss Dakon demanded in a tone that was like a call to arms.

"Frightfully. I'll have some Scotch and soda, too," said Nora, standing up; "that sets me up wonderfully."

"Scotch? Not—*whisky*?"

"Every one is drinking it now."

"I don't. I have nothing of the sort in the house," and Miss Dakon rose too.

Nora brightened. "I remembered that, and I've a flask with me," she said consolingly; "I'll go up now. Oh, here's Ellen." She greeted the maid with genuine warmth, and the woman's plain, kind face beamed. "Come up, like a good soul," she said, moving to the stairs, "and button me up the back. Maybe you could give my hair about twenty strokes,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

too. I'm dead beat, and I'm going to bye-bye early."

Miss Dakon remained standing in the prim drawing-room, boiling with resentment behind her gray face and grim lips. The hatred she felt for Nora was temperamental. In everything, at every turn, Anthony's widow offended her. Her beauty, of the provocative, coquettish type, was irritating; her indifferent manner and babyish slang she thought vulgar; her mourning-clothes, fashioned after progressive ideals, so unlike the five-yard hard crêpe veil in which she encased herself, and the armor of seamed, lusterless stuff behind which her own heart beat, she thought sacrilegious.

But she had to be silent that night. Nora was not in a mood for discussion. She would not talk of personal things, but rattled on about the Southern resort she had come from and the people she had met there. Furthermore, while she talked she sipped from a tall glass full of whisky and bubbling soda.

In the morning, as Nora came shivering



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

from her bath, she met Ellen in the hall. Instead of going down to hominy, baked apples, and coffee, she had Ellen fetch her up some orange-juice, hot buttered toast, a pitcher of creamy, boiling chocolate, and an egg frizzled with a bit of crisp, hot bacon.

“You see,” Mrs. Dakon said with her pleading stare, “I’ve got to fatten up a bit more, Ellen. My throat’s a bit off for these collarless frocks they’re wearing now.”

She enjoyed the breakfast cuddled up in the bedclothes, a velvet dressing-gown and an eiderdown quilt both around her shoulders. Her fingers were a bluish pink from cold as she turned the pages of *La Fille aux Trois Jupons*, but otherwise she was enjoying herself with the unholy joy of the insurrectionist. She felt that if she did not go down, Miss Dakon, following Mahomet’s wisdom about the mountain, would come to her, and she was right. At noon Miss Dakon ascended, entered, and sat down.

“Oh, do put something around you, Aunt



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Abby," Nora cooed from the heap of clothes; "you'll freeze here."

"I never feel the cold," Miss Dakon asserted; "at least I like it. It's healthful and hardening."

"Well, that may be, but it is *not* becoming," and Nora stared with an apparently innocent fixity at Miss Dakon's pink-purple nose.

Miss Dakon hesitated before plunging into the matter that agitated her.

"Am I interrupting your reading?"

"Oh, not a bit. This is a French book. I'm really reading it as part of my study. It's quite deliciously piquant and daring. I can't make out all the words, and I get horribly afraid I'm missing something delightfully awful. One might as well study a language agreeably—mightn't one?"

Miss Dakon, with an inward shudder of distaste, passed to the main point.

"Are you studying French for any particular reason?"



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Nora put the book face down on the bed and clasped her fingers. The battle was to begin.

“I’m brushing up what I learned at school, to know as much as I can before going to Paris. You see, Aunt Abby, that’s where I’m to live.”

“Paris?” Miss Dakon narrowed her eyes, and paused. “Who’s there that you could find a home with?”

“I’ll make my own home.”

“Then you intend doing something to earn a living, of course. It seems to me infinitely more dignified for you to remain in New York, where you can have a shelter with me, and Ruth can be kept at school. In that way you could manage to buy what you both needed on the interest of your seventeen thousand dollars.”

Nora sighed sweetly. “Thank you for offering me a shelter, Aunt Abby, but I don’t need it, and I’ve always longed to live in Paris.”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“But—can you?” Miss Dakon said, the question an invisible arrow.

“Oh, yes.”

“And Ruth’s schooling?”

“I’ll put her in the sweetest convent there. I think it’s called *Les Blanches Sœurs*—the sweetest garden around it——”

“Convent?”

“And I’ve a scheme for Ruth’s future. She’s always had high marks in drawing, but lately her teacher has written me seriously about her genius for it—real genius. Paris is the place for an artist, and when she’s a little older Ruth shall go to one of those darling ateliers—just like Marie Bashkirtseff—and make sketches from models and things, if she wants to. She wrote me that she danced for joy when I told her this—the darling thing!” Nora twirled the pages of *La Fille aux Trois Jupons*, and waited.

“But how can you afford to do all this without earning money yourself some way?”

“Oh, I can. You see, Aunt Abby, I—I’m



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

not depending on the life-insurance money altogether."

"No?" The word was a stifled snort; Miss Dakon's eyes began to gleam.

"I've been most fortunate in—speculation," said Nora, turning on her arm and looking past Miss Dakon's head. "A friend gave me such good advice about stocks—and things like that—and bought some for me."

"Bought—what?"

"Shares," said Nora vaguely.

"Shares in what?"

"That's all I know—shares in something," said Nora, annoyed to feel her face color.

Unbelief and condemnation flared in Miss Dakon's gaze.

"Shares in some mine—Mexico, probably?"

"Yes, I remember now, it was a mine," Nora murmured brightly.

"Name unknown, I suppose?"

Nora moved pettishly. "I left all those



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

details to—to the broker. I couldn't be bothered."

"H'm." Miss Dakon leaned forward, her palms on her knees. "I've heard of some women making sudden fortunes by speculations, *always vague*. But men?—well, men are rarely so fortunate."

"Then I'm even more lucky than I thought," said Nora, as she slid out of bed and tied the somber tassels of the velvet gown about her; "I think I'll dress, and go for a walk, Aunt Abby." She was a little pale as she looked Miss Dakon squarely in the face; "that is, if we've finished our talk."

There was so much that Miss Dakon was trying to keep from saying, she mouthed nervously, and the flaming malice of her eyes in her lined face was an ugly sight.

"I do want to ask, in fact, to insist, as an elder woman and a relative, on one thing," she said, rising too. Standing so, she seemed a composition of buckram and ice-water. "Ruth is Anthony's child. For his sake I'd



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

like to look after her future, to educate her according to dignified and suitable methods.”

“Poor Ruth!” was Nora’s inward exclamation.

“I would take all the responsibility. At my death she’d have about forty thousand dollars, well invested. I’ve saved that from my income.”

Nora had her hands on her hips, her shoulders bent intensely forward, as she spoke:

“You say she’s Anthony’s child. She is *my* child, Miss Dakon.”

“You may find her a burden in Paris. It seems to me you’d be more comfortably arranged, from your point of view, without her,” came in a small voice from Miss Dakon’s almost shut lips.

“And it seems to me you are interfering in my affairs in a very impertinent manner.”

“My duty——”

“‘Your duty!’ How I’ve learned to hate that word because of you. You always call doing something hateful or disagreeable your



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

duty.” She went to the window; “I think you’d better leave me to myself. I’m afraid we’ll quarrel. I don’t know why you asked me to come here just to make me uncomfortable.”

There was a short silence. Without turning, she heard Miss Dakon say in a new, sneering tone of controlled fury:

“That’s the dread of women like you—anything except to be uncomfortable. And it is to escape being uncomfortable you’re to buy luxury with Brundage’s money.”

Nora turned then, trembling, and as white as milk.

“When you were ill, his lawyer came here; I saw him, and though he was very cautious, by a chance word he betrayed that there was some sort of money arrangement between you and—that man.” All the secret venom of Miss Dakon’s nature was in her gleaming eyes and twitching face. “You see, I know,” she said, a suggestion of palsy in her excitably moving body, “and I know more than that.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

I know that Anthony discovered—*something*—and killed himself because of it. I know you're not fit to bring up your daughter. I shudder to think of her in the charge of a woman like you. What will become of her? I could tear her from you! *She's* a Dakon. You're a stranger."

With these words Miss Dakon flew in a whirl of black, rattling skirts from the room, leaving Nora blanched, speechless, her mouth opened like the letter O. For a full three minutes she stood rigid. As an hysterical whimper ran through her, her eyes fell on an illuminated High-Church calendar on the wall over the spot where Miss Dakon had stood. She saw these words:

"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

She swept it from its hook, and tore it to bits, sobbing as she did so.

"I hate her! I would hate all Christians, if they were like her."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

That afternoon Nora drove to the Waldorf. Her trunks were already there, her room having been engaged before she went to Miss Dakon's.

After a warm bath and a light dinner she tried some cold-cream she had heard enthusiastically recommended, and went to bed early. She had the aptitude of putting unpleasant things away from her. Miss Dakon already belonged to her past.



## CHAPTER X

NORA was by nature one of those people fitted to love Paris—that is, to love certain complexions of it. Its art life, that most enchanting phase of it wherein workers drink deep of creative ecstasy, was of course a sealed book to her. But she loved its brightness and fluttering life; the trees budding everywhere, making the streets aisles of twinkling green; the flash and dash of its many fountains; the whiteness of its sculpture against tender skies; its outdoor life, where people ate and drank at tables on the very streets among passers-by, all like children in a big, bright nursery; the thistledown soul of things, its gay air and constant laughter. All this made her continuously cheerful.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

She had a passion for clothes, and Paris is a temptress who creates appetite. During the first years there Nora knew the rapture of new birth as she was evolved into a woman of fashion under the most entrancing conditions. The confirming touch which exquisite gowning gave to her beauty dazzled her with a self-intoxication more satisfying in its way, and decidedly more lasting, than any romance she had known. Then, too, the cosmopolitanism of Paris gave her new ambitions about social position. She touched, in passing, counts and countesses, even a prince or two, and all found her charming.

Her first years were nomadic. She went from big hotels like the Continental, frequented by tourists, to small, dainty ones, more French and valued by the initiated. After a course of these she took a furnished apartment, a season at a time, and became during the winters an absentee on the Riviera. But Paris at length becoming not only a haunting mood, but a part of herself, like hun-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

ger and thirst, she settled definitely into a resident, sunk the roots of her life into it, and except for her English speech, used perhaps equally with French, she was a Parisienne.

“*Tout-à-fait Parisienne*,” as modistes purred admiringly when poising the most *chic* of millinery creations upon her rippling hair.

It was then that her ambition to found a *salon* flamed up. She rented a beautiful, *bijou* apartment on the Avenue Montaigne, furnished it delicately, luxuriously, and became what she considered a personage. Titles were called out on her Tuesdays, and her rooms often looked like a miniature *Vernissage*, so exquisite were the fabrics trailed there, so ornamental the idlers who tinkled her cups. Many of the titles were questionable; a goodly percentage of her visitors were of the sort whose histories bear only twilight inspection, and become blotted scrawls in the light of day; there were hangers-on of various



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

sorts, mostly with dazzling expectations for the future and no present to speak of; and with this false glitter there was some gold; with all the affectation, pretense, and decadence, some honesty and genuine devotion.

While her mother was passing through these phases, Ruth was inconspicuous. From the point of view of her elders, she was merely "growing up." She was being fed, clothed, educated, trained, and kept healthy. Her frocks were merely coverings, her boots things to walk in, her face something to be washed, and her hair fulfilled all that was expected of it when it lay in a sleek plait down her back. Her opinions were of no importance to her mother, heard for the most part with an amiable, unlistening smile. She had been a pretty child. She became a bony, pale, gaunt-faced girl of fifteen, so that once during holidays at home her long face had irritated her mother.

"I wonder," she said dreamily, as they were



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

driving one day, "if you're going to look like a horse always."

She forgot this almost immediately after saying it, but Ruth wept that night because she was so ugly. She who loved beauty looked "like a horse."

However uninteresting her years at the convent were to men and women, they had been important to her. Outwardly she was the demure, obedient schoolgirl, but her companions knew her differently. They knew of romantic friendships that were never to end, sealed at midnight in writing of real, red blood; they knew that Ruth loved Rochester, in "Jane Eyre," madly, and fairly sickened in her dreams to think that he was not really alive somewhere in the world, that she might perhaps meet him when she should walk no more, one of twenty, in the convent garden; they knew that she was one day to be a great artist, for she had confidently told them so, following the information with caricatures of people they knew, so uniquely characteristic



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

and droll that their secret distribution brought down a variety of punishments.

At seventeen she was very pretty again, and the "growing up" only clung to her in fragments as the shell of the egg does to the feathered atom beginning to "cheep" for itself as an individual. She loved Paris as ardently as did Nora, but differently. It was the haunting, inspiring soul of art surging under the sea of frivolity like a passionate undercurrent, that drew her on. The city's beauty on every side whispered of this fanatic apprenticeship to the creation of beauty. She lived in the thought of accomplishment, ambition a fever; she was pale from her dreams, her eyes misty and exalted.

"If Ruth keeps on, she'll be so pretty, she might marry—*anything*," Mrs. Dakon often thought as Ruth approached twenty.

During these days Ruth frequently stood in the Louvre, gazing at Vandyke's Charles I. The sad face with the predestination of doom in the eyes reminded her of her father.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“ Oh, if some day I could make a heart beat on canvas that way! ” she would think, her own heart aching with a sad rapture like that born of Chopin’s music and the perfume of the camellia.



## CHAPTER XI

THE students at Dubosc's were making ready to leave for the day. Canvases were draped, brushes were being wiped. There was a tearing off of blouses, a hurried tidying of hair, an attempt to get paint-stained fingers into gloves. The light was almost gone from the north windows and big skylight. The room was gray, the bustling figures spectral. Matches crackled and cigarettes flamed in the dusk like fireflies.

"Coming, Ruth?" a big English girl asked, peering between the easels in a near-sighted way. "Where's she gone? That girl's like nothing human—the way she can bolt."

"She's over there, Babe, taking a last look at her old woman," said a man's voice.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Babe, named so in the studio because she was so ponderous, turned in her ample way and saw a young man sitting near the door. He was smoking, and both elbows were on his knees in an attitude of fixed patience.

“I might have known you were somewhere near,” she laughed. “But I wouldn’t wait, Cautley, if I were you. I’ve something I want to talk to Ruth about most particularly.”

“My case exactly.” He stood up and faced her squarely. “Go away, Babe, like a good chap. I’m going to give Ruth another chance to refuse me. If she says ‘No’ again, I’ll fold up my tent and silently steal away. Do take yourself off. It would cramp my style to have you about.” The words were flippant, the voice miserable; his young face, dimly outlined in the thickening shadows, a very unhappy and defiant one.

“You’re an idiot! Why don’t you give up gracefully? Ruth will never marry you. She’s in love now.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"Then tell me his name." He caught her wrist. "Don't go, Babe. His name!"

"His name is Art. Sometimes she calls him very tenderly her Career. You can't cut Art out, Tom. Well, here she comes, and I'll go."

Ruth came from between the easels, pinning on her hat as she walked. She looked under her lashes at Cautley and handed him her gloves.

"I didn't know you were waiting," she said carelessly, adding, with a little sigh: "I've been breaking my heart over my old woman's face—haven't got that strange smile among the wrinkles a bit. It's getting dark, but I want to walk home."

He followed her to the narrow street where the omnibuses thundered and the people surged by, not discriminating between driveway and pavements. There was a touching look of humility, happiness, and anxiety in his strong, blond face. This contrasted with Ruth's. There was no sentiment in her shining



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

eyes, and her oddly curved brow was puckered prettily as she drew on her gloves.

She was now the Ruth of Bate's Crossing, grown large. In the passage of these twelve years, her face had not lost its most striking childish characteristics. Her brown hair was still parted in two straight, lustrous bands with soft, escaping tendrils around the ears, the difference being that under her hat it showed in a soft knot instead of a plait; her lashes flickered in the old way as she glanced about; her mouth quivered in fascinating mobility; her eyes had the green and topaz lights, but more vivid; the odd dimple made ghostlike appearances in her cheek even as she talked unsmilingly. She was slender, and of a graceful middle height.

Ruth was not a beauty after accepted canons. There were a few girls in the studio with features and coloring beside whom she was like a study in gray or brown. But she was the power, the magnet, nevertheless. Her face had the charm that no string of words,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

however exact, can describe. She was high-spirited, sympathetic, daring, unconventional, sincere. She could blaze into a splendid temper; she could be gentle as a Madonna. She gave the impression, as one knew her, of being able to walk through pitch, of even analyzing it, without it staining her. She knew much, from observation, about the "sad earth" and men and women, for her eyes and brain were comprehensive; but she had big understanding, toleration and pity for it all. Her personality was puzzling, her smile most endearing. There was an irritating, delightful quality in her, the wildness and inconsequence of a fay.

"Hurry, Tom," she said, lifting her face to the April dusk. "I want to cross the Seine before the grayness is gone. Oh, Tom, mustn't it be frightful to be blind?" She gave a quick shiver and looked up at him. "To miss all this—this misty street with the kiosks flaming, and the lights in the shops making the windows like jewels in the dusk



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

—and that girl coming demurely from her confirmation, and that soldier talking to his old mother. Tom, let's say, 'Thank God for sight!' Oh, it is so good."

Tom looked at her steadily, gravely. The tenderness and fire in his eyes made her look away.

"Thank God for sight this moment more than all others," he said fervently, and added in a breath, "Oh, Ruth!"

She flicked the seriousness from her with an impatient movement of her head, and laughed.

"I might have known. Your persistence——"

"No, it's despair. Ruth——"

"Please don't spoil our walk," she interrupted, with a flash of temper, and almost ran beside the book-stalls on the parapets along the Quai Voltaire till the Pont du Carrousel was reached. "Look," she said, and, leaning on the railing, drew in the details of the moving picture.

A greenish sky fading into purple showed



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

through the mists. Paris to the right was a thing of mystery, budding trees, flickering lights. Over the bridges the crowds moved without pause. Along the lapping Seine the brightly lit barges came puffing, and passed under the arches.

Dreaming, like a bright mask, settled on Ruth's face. Her eyes were inspired. She slipped away on the magic of her thoughts, and when Tom touched her arm she looked at him, startled. When she spoke, she answered the love in his brown eyes that were like the patient, affectionate eyes of a dog.

"Tom, dear," she said, very gently, and looked away from him, "I know all you want to say; but it isn't any use. That way I don't care for you at all. Love seems like insanity, or some other amazing thing, and I never think of it as happening to me."

"You seem to know your own mind," he said miserably.

"To think," she said, "that I'm making you suffer because I'm honest with you. I'm



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

so sorry for that, I've a pain in my heart, Tom."

"You like me, but you never can love me. I'd rather you hated me. There might be some chance then," he burst out.

They walked on, and Ruth did not speak again till they had crossed the bridge and reached the arches of the Rue de Rivoli.

"Then the fact that you are my dearest friend doesn't count?"

"Oh, yes, but it's a savorless thing compared to love. Friendship doesn't feed a heart that's hungry for love. All the fine phrases in the world couldn't do that, not all the intellectual sympathy. But just one touch could, just one look. It seems to me I'd be glad to die to-morrow if you could look at me and touch me that way," he said brokenly.

Ruth grew thoughtful and a shadow fell on her eyes. To feel for a human being what Tom felt for her was a terrible thing. What power it gave the one who was loved, a power often not valued and without charm. Tom's



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

very life was in her indifferent hand. He was not master of himself. The thought of her dominated him. Independence and self-content were shriveled in the fires of such love. It was a mystery to her, but to realize that it could ever bring such unrest into a life made her vaguely afraid.

She became silent again till the Rond Point was reached, and they turned down the Avenue Montaigne. Her home was there, only a stone's throw from the fountains splashing over the beds of yellow tulips. The avenue was dark and deserted under the close lines of blooming horse-chestnut trees.

"Look here, Tom," and Ruth came to a standstill where the shadows were massed, and laid her hand on his arm. "I want you to know just how I care for you. When I'm with you, I'm happy. You and I understand each other. We both look at life with the artist's eyes and mind—and, oh, how much this is! I'd miss you terribly if you left Paris, Tom. You're my truest friend, my very dear-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

est companion. Now, I love Noddy—oh, I love her so!—but we're like people talking a different language. She doesn't care for what I like. I'd go crazy if I had to lead the life she does. Now, it seems to me that if I should ever meet any one I could love better than my mother, and who understands me as you do, I'd be in love. But maybe that never can be. Meanwhile, Tom, don't leave me. You mean a lot to me. I know you've been talking of going home to New York, and Joe Berardy said you'd surely go soon, as your uncle was dead and his fortune was yours. But I can't spare you. Tom, dear Tom, stay in Paris."

He folded his hand over hers and gave her a last long look of passionate love before he tried to summon to his eyes the good fellowship she craved.

"Ruth, if you want me, for any reason, nothing in the world can make me go away."

She pressed his arm and flung her head up happily.

"Let's go to Suresnes to-morrow, sketch



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

all the morning, and have one of old Margot's breakfasts—bread and butter, radishes, creamy cheese, salad, frizzled eggs, red wine. You see, I expect you to bring an appetite with you."

"At nine?" he asked humbly, as they paused before the courtyard of a splendid apartment house. "All right. But sha'n't I see you to-night?"

"Not to-night," she said in amazement, a provoking smile following. "Professor Gunning is going to play his latest arias to-night. You know he admits only Noddy and me."

He watched her as she went up the inner steps to the big glass doors which a *concierge* swung open for her, saw her pass along by the big, potted plants, up the white marble stairs and beyond his longing eyes.



## CHAPTER XII

PERFUME and silence hung like a Presence over the apartment *au deuxième* which Ruth entered. One look, and the observant would know that this was the home of a luxurious woman, one that liked to see reflections of herself, so, presumably, a pretty woman.

A blond boy, with the freshness of Gascony still in his pink cheeks, who visibly exulted in his brown livery with silver buttons, admitted Ruth into a dimly lit hall furnished with tapestries and divans. She passed into the *salon* beyond, and, taking off her sailor hat, sat in the reclining-chair by the window where she could see the moon rising over the dormer roofs of the big white houses opposite.

The *salon* was of polished white wood. Odd doors, cutting it in half, had small square mir-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

rors let in, giving the effect of big small-paned windows within the room. Rose silk and creamy net were at the long casements leading to an iron balcony.

This balcony was like an outer room, a boudoir *al fresco*. Growing flowers swayed against the railings, rugs and low cane chairs furnished it; a striped awning flapped over it.

In the *salon* there were queer long-necked vases filled with great bunches of cherry blossoms and lilacs. It was spring indoors and out.

To Ruth's inquiries, Étienne, the Gascon boy, replied that madame was not yet home from the Bois; that madame had gone driving with the American lady who dined with them last night; that madame had said, if she did not return for dinner, mademoiselle was not to wait, but to have her dinner at the usual time.

Ruth dismissed him with a nod. She was accustomed to her mother's whimsical engagements. In a moment the matter was forgotten, even the room she sat in slipped from her con-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

scious sight, and no memory of Tom Cautley's pain and prayer remained with her. Ruth was bond-slave to one thing only—a sexless exaltation before the white fire of art, whose radiance unrolled within the soul one wide horizon after another. It was a rapture with nothing material in it. One whose feet were poorly shod, whose body was poorly nourished, could buoyantly journey toward those horizons, and, even if the glory always receded and shadow always stayed, there was the joy of the quest.

The canvas she had toiled over that day, not knowing how the hours were hurrying by till darkness had made her put away her brushes, engrossed her dreaming now. How to get the smile among the wrinkles, while the aged mouth of the old model was set in tight furrows and the eyes were quiet?

“It's her happy soul shining through the flesh. The soul does not age. Her body is the battered envelope which holds it, but the soul stays young, so that when she dies it could go with fitness into a newly born babe. That's



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

it, that shine of the young soul through the wrinkled flesh. Oh! if I can get it—I feel it so. I will—I will.” She sighed and clasped her hands behind her head.

Étienne was moving about in the dining-room. The chink of glass made her aware at length that it was time to change for dinner. The ghosts of paint-stains still clung to her fingers. She realized, too, that she had had only an apple and a *baba* for lunch, and that Étienne’s salads were things to dream of.

Before going to her room she paused at the door of the *salle à manger*.

“Go up to Professor Gunning’s, Étienne, and ask him to dine with me. I hear him playing. Tell him I’m alone, and he must come.”

When she came into the *salon*, half an hour later, in a faint mauve gown with a fall of chiffon around the shoulders, the professor was there, looking over a magazine.

“And you didn’t disdain my invitation,” said Ruth gaily, “though the queen is absent. Nice man.”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

The professor flung back his gray head and showed a humorous, Irish face, where woe and wrath struggled for the mastery.

“The queen, is it? It’s little she thinks of me, me dear. I’m no more than the black ribbon on her little shoe.”

He sighed, pressed Ruth’s hand, and kissed it with the stateliness fashionable in the ’50s.

“Noddy thinks a lot of the ribbon on her shoe,” Ruth smiled. “She spends a lot of time tying it and making it into a saucy bow, and pats it very gently when it’s done; so you’re not so badly off, are you?”

“Ah, Ruth, me dear, laugh at me, if you will. But may you never play ducks and drakes with any poor divil’s heart as your lovely mama does with mine. It’s hideous cruel of her.”

“What’s the matter now, professor?”

“She was to go with me to the *Salon* yesterday, and along comes this new-found friend, this Mrs. St. Leger, and she throws me over for her—pif!—*sans cérémonie*. I was to play



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

her me new aria to-night, and all I get is a *petit bleu* from the Hôtel Ritz, saying: 'Sorry! I won't be home to-night. Off to see Granier with Mrs. St. Leger.' Who is this American, anyway?" he demanded, pausing in his walk.

"Noddy knew her a long time ago in New York. They met in a bonnet shop in the Rue Caumartin yesterday morning."

"Ah, that's it, is it?" he said discontentedly. "I'll wager they're talking hats at this moment, instead of being here to listen to my new sextet."

He was a good-looking Irishman of sixty, though he admitted with unwinking, blue-eyed candor to being forty-nine. He had lived in Paris for sixteen years, and spoke French with a creamy brogue and the English of Dublin with a French accent, carefully acquired. He lived luxuriously, kept a carriage, thought himself a great, unrecognized musician, and for six years had been an unrequited, servile worshiper of Mrs. Dakon's.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

To that inconsequent little fashion-plate he was necessary in a way. Other admirers might waver and depart. The flame of his worship to her beauty was always trimmed and burning. At odd times, when more attractive men were for various reasons unavailable, the professor could be relied on as an escort. He never forgot the *fête*-days, nor birthdays; selected excellent gifts and offered them romantically; was always at a train to say good-by when Mrs. Dakon was leaving for Trouville, Ostend, or Monte Carlo, and the first to bid her welcome home among flowers purchased lavishly.

The professor was a home comfort. Mrs. Dakon would have missed him from her life, much as she would have missed Sylvie, the cook, who made excellent sauces, had no followers, and was satisfied with small commissions on the marketing.

The professor was, figuratively, under her little French heel, and all he asked was a smile, a kind word, a seat at dinner occasionally, a



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

listening ear when he played—all things that cost nothing in the coin of the realm.

While Ruth was dining with him and listening to a *potpourri* made up of her mother's fascinations, his faith in his own genius, and kindly gossip about every one they knew, Mrs. Dakon was dining at the Hôtel Ritz.

Life seemed good unto her. Mrs. St. Leger had told her she was a marvel.

“Prettier, my dear, than you were twelve years ago. Different, but prettier, and with the country rawness gone. You are a fascinating *Parisienn*e. There's finish to you, a perfection that is tantalizing. Our women dress perfectly, but they cannot get the French flick—whatever it is. You have it. You dress like an American who buys her things on the Rue de la Paix, and with it you have the—flick. When that's said, all's said.”

A near-by mirror put a guarantee on these exclamations. Nora saw there a woman who might or might not be thirty, in a pale pink filmy gown where lace and chiffon were subtly



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

blent, a big, shepherdess hat of lace slashing her brows with shadow. Her gray eyes, that Mrs. St. Leger remembered as soft and appealing in vacuous discontent, were now softer and more appealing from much practise before a mirror, for Nora knew her world well, and had fully digested the fact that it is the wisdom of the small woman to beseech, never to command.

There is a delicately artificial style of beauty much in vogue in these days in Paris, perhaps the one place where women of all classes use cosmetics freely, as a matter of course. Nora had acquired the fashionable, Parisian complexion, a mystery to the most eager searcher after knowledge save to those who have it. It was composed of a blending of massage, ointments, bleaches, powders, and the result was a porcelain whiteness, not hard in tone, but unlike human flesh. Her lashes were delicately darkened, and gave her eyes a stereotyped languor and mystery; her lips were touched with cerise, and her hair, from a nat-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

ural blond, had become a beautiful silvery gold like the silk that wraps corn.

Ruth often wondered just how much less pretty her mother would be if she could not afford a *masseuse*, and somebody pitched all her lotions into the Seine. She never saw her, even *en négligé* over *café au lait*, till skin, hair, and eyes were "done" for the day. When she was ill, the room was made black, and Ruth's sympathies were expended on a shadow with tossed hair, whose nose was buried in the pillows.

The years had had their way, however, with Mrs. St. Leger. She was one of these women who are either lazy or philosophical, or who possess so little vanity it does not seem worth while to fence with Time and keep his foil from touches that count. She had grown older as a man does, frankly, cheerfully, and neither a pepper-and-salt pompadour under her expensive hat, nor seams drawn taut over a fat back, spoiled her enjoyment of French sauces and champagne.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Ever miss New York?” asked Mrs. St. Leger.

“I had little experience of New York, but I miss some things American,” said Nora. “Do you know, there are times when I long for the American seasoning in food? The French only know how to make sauces. I long for our iced melons in summer, for our delicious coffee. Why is there no decent coffee to be had anywhere but in America and Vienna?”

“Oh, now I do see a change in you—and for the worse,” Mrs. St. Leger laughed. “When a man or woman gets fussy about food the glamour of life is going.”

“Oh, I miss other things,” Nora said hastily. “I just spoke of those *en passant*. I miss our fast trains and Turkish baths, and our adorable, luxurious bath-rooms which are found with the most modest flats. It’s a heavenly joy to keep oneself fit in America. Here and in Great Britain, and all over Europe, it’s such an effort, a disagreeable duty.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Will you ever go back to America to live?”

“Never. I couldn’t begin to live there, as I do here, on my income. Besides, I’d rather have Paris with its discomforts thrown in, than America with its luxury.”

“You see lots of Americans, I suppose?”

“Not many. My friends are a cosmopolitan lot, a sprinkling of Americans, but no more than of other nationalities.”

“I wonder if you’d mind if I asked you one question,” Mrs. St. Leger burst out after some reflection. “It’s been burning my tongue and I can’t keep it back. Have you ever seen Larry Brundage since— I mean, when did you last see him?”

Nora’s lashes flickered thoughtfully as she prodded a prawn with her fork. In a ghostly way a realization went over her coldly of how many years had gone since that past which was like another life. Lawrence had become but a name to her, his face dim, like that of one long dead, until yesterday, when she had come face to face with Mrs. St. Leger.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Let me see,” she murmured. “Oh, it’s ages ago. If you live in Paris one full year nearly every one you ever knew will pass you somewhere or other. Since I’ve lived here I’ve caught sight of him twice, once about five years ago, and once about three years before that.”

“You weren’t speaking to him?”

“No. He was at the opera the first time. I don’t believe he saw me. The second time we were driving; it was showery—we passed rapidly.” She lifted her champagne-glass and drank with delicate enjoyment. “I suppose you and he are close friends still?”

Mrs. St. Leger pursed up her lips.

“Whenever we run across each other. You know I’ve lived in England a lot; motoring on Surrey roads is quite as near as I want to come to Paradise. He’s lived—everywhere. I heard of him in Jerusalem last year—or was it Chile? I forget. You know Charlie Wix is dead. Amusing beggar he was. Since then



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Larry hasn't gone about with such a fast crowd."

"Perhaps his health has pulled him up short. I thought him quite worn, and that was five years ago."

"He's not forty-four yet—young, as age goes in these days. He's kept his hair; he has a handsome, tanned face; and that figure of his is just the same. I shouldn't wonder if he'd marry a débutante. When a man gets to his age, and is stupendously rich and a bachelor, he either goes the pace till he's quickly fit for nothing but a club window and a bottle of whisky, or he turns a moral somersault and goes back to first principles. Try some of this mushroom patty, my dear."

Nora scarcely heard the last words.

"I've a curious feeling," she said, looking frightened, though she laughed. "Have you ever had it? Your flesh creeps slowly from head to foot and your breath seems to go. My old nigger mammy used to say it meant that some one was walking over your grave."



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“I get it when I think of my first,” said Mrs. St. Leger. “Perhaps talking of Larry has had that effect on you—like resurrecting a ghost, you know.”

When they reached the *Variétés*, where *Les Deux Écoles* held the stage, the first act was almost over, and Jeanne Granier’s melodious contralto voice was uttering an exquisite cynicism on marriage. When the curtain fell, Nora moved back into the box to make some mysterious passes at her nose with a minute powder-puff taken from a gold box as large as a franc, which hung from her chatelaine. Mrs. St. Leger leaned over the rim and surveyed the men in the first stalls, who had risen and were now, after the French custom, lounging with their backs to the stage, giving their attention to the audience.

“My dear, there’s little Count de Cenantes. He sees me.” She nodded, and motioned with her fan. “He’s coming up. He’s most amusing. There’s some one with him. Yes, he’s fetching up the man with him. Who is he?—



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

it can't be—yes. Come here, come here!" she called to Nora. "No—they're gone." Then she faced her squarely, and spoke with an important calm and emphasis. "Now, whom do you suppose De Cenantes is bringing up here?"

The answer seemed to leave Nora's lips automatically:

"Lawrence Brundage."

"Did you see him?" she exclaimed.

"No."

"Well, don't look frightened. But how did you know?"

Nora sat down weakly.

"I felt it."



## CHAPTER XIII

DISSIMULATION is society's most necessary lesson. Once acquired, it serves as an invisible armor. Two come face to face before others, and while eyes are guarded, murmur in level voices: "So glad—pleasure—so unexpected"—or something else equally flat. Nothing must tell that the last time they stood so, passion, or grief, or tragedy clasped them about. The effort required is so vital it brings its own support.

Nora, while she trembled, did not forget to smile lazily under her lashes. To Lawrence the meeting was uncomfortable, though he was outwardly a model of polite, suave repose.

Mrs. St. Leger flew to the rescue. She appropriated Lawrence, and left the count to Nora.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"What are you going to do?" whispered Mrs. St. Leger while pretending to talk of some one below.

"Bolt as soon as I can," he said.

"Isn't she lovely?"

"Lovely, but stereotyped. Every other woman at Armenonville or the races has that startlingly white skin. How do they do it?"

"We can buy pallor in Paris," said Mrs. St. Leger.

Nora's laugh had meanwhile become too frequent, and her eyes wandered stealthily to Lawrence. In a twinkling the content of her pampered life shriveled under the burning memories which raced before her mind. Fingers seemed stealing about her heart waking it to troubled sweetness. One look into Lawrence's eyes, and she that had been as one dead in a sense was alive again. Similar thoughts to those which Tom's infatuation for herself had inspired in Ruth came to her mother now, but she had her own heart under the lens.

It was strange, it was terrible, that a trick



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

of expression, a voice, just the way the hair grew on a man's head, his walk, or the bearing of his shoulders, could possess this magic, could send this eating pain into a heart. She tried to look at Lawrence critically. She had known other men as good in their way to look at, attractive men of the world, but never with the something that she had found once, and now found again when his eyes rested on her.

He was thinner, browner than in the past. His smooth, straight hair was graying. His face was frankly tired save when he smiled. But the air of distinction was greater. Marks of dissipation on his face had gone, and those of experience had taken their place. Many who would have passed him twelve years ago would look at him with a second interested glance now, as a man that had lived keenly and in many lands; that perhaps had suffered. But in the last fancy they would have been wrong. He had never suffered in the vital sense, because he had never loved.

These were Nora's thoughts as she furtively



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

watched him. She had cause to hate him. Often, before she had learned to forget, she had prayed that some woman would teach him the lesson of pain. The resentment was there to-night, gaining gradual strength as she remembered, but it was like a death-potion blended with an elixir, for the possibility of love was there too.

How it came about she did not clearly know, for she seemed half-dreaming all the night, but they supped at the *Café de Paris*, and it was two o'clock before she found herself in a *fiacre* with Lawrence. Then, as they leaned back, the quiet streets about them, the mask dropped from their faces.

There had been light gossip and banter with the champagne. They had been like new, gay acquaintances, but now that Mrs. St. Leger, from pure mischievousness, had managed that Lawrence should take his old love home, some word about their true attitude was necessary. He felt cross and injured, but leaped into the breach.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“I hope our meeting was not too unpleasant,” he said formally. “I would have prevented it if I could, but I didn’t know.”

Nora was silent. She was thinking of the day when she read his letter of farewell; and Tony—forgotten for so long—seemed suddenly horribly real, his dead face upon her knees. She could have burst into hysterical sobs. The champagne, the excitement, the surprise made her feel this way, no doubt. She looked at Lawrence once, and looked away.

“However,” the voice she loved—or hated—which?—went on, “since it’s happened after all these years, I want to know if life is going well with you.”

She laughed, and it had an ugly sound.

“I am well, healthy; I have comfort, good clothes, and good food—thanks to your money.”

“We need not speak of that,” he said with distaste. “You were very sensible. I’ve been so glad that at any rate I could do that much for you.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"Yes, I dare say it made the rest easier," and again she laughed unpleasantly.

"It was better to be honest with you," he said with some defiance. "I have not married. I always realized that as a husband I should be a failure. Believe me, that knowledge has its own pain. I'm worthless, a spectator at a show, a wanderer, lacking what most men find so easily. I was so sorry," he paused, a real vibration in his voice, "so sorry to hurt you. It taught me such a lesson. No other woman has since suffered through me."

"It seems strange to speak of that time after all these years. I never dreamed I should," she said rapidly. "But I must for once. You should have married me, no matter what unhappiness to us both might have followed. That would have given me a footing on something sure, and no misery could be as bad as what you portioned out to me. Remembering Tony," she said, in a chilling whisper, "oh, remembering him, and that it was



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

a letter I had written to you—oh, remembering *that*, how could you do it?”

The years had made Lawrence more serious; his conscience was more troublesome, and the pale, very pretty face with accusing eyes seen in the starlight stirred him to impulsive pity. Before he could find words in which to answer her, the *fiacre* turned from the Champs Élysées into the Avenue Montaigne.

“I live here,” she said, resuming a formal tone, and the *fiacre* stopped.

As they walked to the big jade-green doors, and he laid his hand on the bell communicating with the *concierge’s* lodge, he looked down at her seriously. He would not have felt so sorry for her had she been a big woman.

“Let me see you again,” was all he said, but her heart put a world of meaning into the words.

“Why not? Let us see if friendship is possible, if you like,” and she held out her hand.

“Does this mean you forgive me, Nora?”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

His voice speaking her name affected her like a caress.

“ I think so.”

She turned to go, for the doors had swung back automatically, but she paused and considered something.

“ When you come—remember,” she said, her lips moving nervously, “ that Ruth knows nothing.”

“ Ruth? ” he said, puzzled, and added, quickly: “ Oh, yes, of course.”

“ And about the money—she thinks—I made it—speculating—years ago. I could not say it came to me from the family, for Aunt Abby knew there was nothing, and told Ruth.”

“ I see. I wouldn't have touched on it, of course,” he said, and putting away the unpleasant topic took up another. “ I quite forgot little Ruth, although I've often thought of her. That dimple. From a shovel, wasn't it? ”

“ No, from a dust-pan. Good night.”



## CHAPTER XIV

TEA was served at five on Mrs. Dakon's balcony these fine days, whenever she was at home. It was not quite a week after her meeting with Lawrence when he appeared just in time for a cup of it, and found Mrs. St. Leger there ahead of him.

"You can't lose me, Larry," she said, as he sat down opposite her among the flower-pots. "You know our tastes were always alike, and Bo-peep is a great comfort to me, too."

The inference and the old name annoyed him. He did not respond to her smile. He regretted coming. He called himself a fool. He had not really wanted to come, except for a desire not to hurt Nora by failing to keep his promise. He had felt sorry for her, as



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

they drove home in the rawness and quiet of the new day, but now that he saw her moving radiantly in the sunlight, her smile coquettish, her hair too glittering to be real, her face too white and her lips too red, the boredom that seized him so easily made itself felt, and he wished himself far away from the Avenue Montaigne.

“Where’s St. Leger?” he asked, in a surly tone, to turn the conversation in a new direction.

“Let me see. It’s about noon in New York. I fancy he’s just getting up and wishing his head didn’t ache,” she said, and stirred her tea comfortably.

“Ah, that’s the way it goes, eh? There’s an awful sameness to your marriages, Pussy,” he laughed. “And you look more cheerful each time. When does the case come on?”

“There’ll be no divorce this time. I’ll spend my life in shackles, but St. Leger and I’ll arrange always to pass each other on the high seas.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"It would be really too awful, a third divorce," said Nora, with a rippling laugh. "Think of it. How people would stare!"

"Here's the way I look at it," said Mrs. St. Leger. "A first divorce is a tragedy; in a second the people become high-class comedians; a third is a roaring farce, shriekingly funny, and that's all. You then become the property of the comic papers and are meat for topical songs."

"Your recuperative powers are marvelous," said Lawrence, and looked away from her to the picture of Paris at his feet.

Through the branches of the horse-chestnuts he caught glimpses of the avenue, a slow-moving 'bus crowded on top, carriages returning from the Bois with the glitter from the sunset on the harness, a trio of mounted officers in scarlet walking their horses, some nuns in blue-gray with flapping white head-dresses.

"Just see that girl, coming this way!" said Mrs. St. Leger. "That's a picture only possible in Paris. And isn't it refreshing, un-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

studied? If a girl did that on Fifth Avenue she'd be mobbed. Nothing surprises the French."

Lawrence turned to look, and Mrs. Dakon leaned over him. He saw an open *fiacre*, driven by a cherry-faced *cocher* with a white glazed hat, and sitting back among big branches of flowers and growing plants which filled the space was a bareheaded girl, whose brown hair was lifted from her forehead by the breeze.

"It's Ruth," said Mrs. Dakon. "That girl spends all her spare francs on flowers. She hates hats," she added apologetically. "She's a regular gipsy."

Ruth looked toward the balcony, gave a flashing smile as she waved her sailor hat and disappeared. Very soon they heard her voice in the *salon* giving Étienne and the *concierge* directions about the flowers. When she came out on the balcony and shook hands with Mrs. St. Leger, she looked at Lawrence with candid curiosity.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Ruth, this is an old friend,” her mother began. “You know I told you of meeting——”

“Oh, yes. I should have known you, Mr. Brundage,” she said, her changeful face bright with welcome. “Would you have known me?”

“Indeed I should,” said Lawrence. “You’re the Ruth I knew, grown big, that’s all.”

“And with my hair done up, but not very neatly, I’ll admit.”

“But with the dimple doing business at the old stand.”

She laughed gaily.

“That’s American slang. Tom Cautley says it. I love it.”

“Have some tea, Ruth?”

“I’ll take a little bit of tea and a lot of cake. Here’s a nice, chunky piece, black with raisins.”

She sat down near Lawrence, and, while she drank her tea with enjoyment, he saw



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

she was looking at him and into the past he recalled. He felt his spirit refreshed by her presence. She was absolutely free from affectation or self-consciousness. Her manner was as simple and direct as a pleasant boy's, yet her charm was made of ingredients that were entirely feminine. In her face there was such light and shade of expression as he had never seen; her eyes were like aquamarines held before a light; her smile was never twice the same; her voice was full of inflections that magnetized; her swift movements were all grace.

He sat forward and looked at her fixedly until her cheeks warmed.

"Are you one of those queer people, Mr. Brundage, who can read one's thoughts?" she asked, with a whimsical movement of her lips.

"You—you—little Ruth," he said slowly, "must be twenty, or past it. Lord! how old I feel!"

"Twenty-one next month," said Ruth promptly.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Please—*please* don’t be statistical,” Mrs. Dakon pleaded, and flung up her hands helplessly. “A grown daughter is such a give-away.”

“Yes,” said Lawrence, “Ruth stands for a succession of mile-stones. But you ought not to object to that. Sometimes the mile-stones are the most welcome things in the landscape.”

“I hate them!” Mrs. Dakon snapped. “Nasty things—always pointing and telling the truth.”

“Both things that are considered bad form nowadays. But there’s worse to come,” said Mrs. St. Leger, as she gave an unctuous little laugh and rose to go. “Some day Ruth will make you a mother-in-law to a great big man.”

Ruth bent over and kissed her mother’s querulous brow. She knew how distasteful the subject was to her.

“Don’t believe it, Noddy. I’ll never marry. You and I’ll grow old together, good chums.”

“If you’d only stick to that, you’d be in



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

luck," Mrs. St. Leger exclaimed. "To look at life through the circle of a marriage-ring is to have a very small horizon. But you'll be a fool, too, and take the little horizon and the big fellow some day."

Étienne appeared at the window.

"Monsieur Cautley."

"Oh, it's Tom," said Ruth gladly, "and the tea's cold. Here, Étienne, make some fresh, quickly, and fetch some cake."

Tom, young, big, blond, stepped out. After introductions to Mrs. St. Leger and Lawrence he sat down next Ruth and looked at her. There was that in his brown eyes which sent a pang through Lawrence. A bitter truth came home to him. Although, despite his graying hair, he was still counted among the ranks of young men, he had lost the something that emanated from this handsome boy, twenty-five at most. It was the animal joy of breath, the full pulse of adolescence.

"I'll drop you at your hotel, Lawrence.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Bo-peep is coming with me. She's getting her hat," whispered Mrs. St. Leger. "You can see you're not wanted here."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, *this* is the big fellow. Ten to one he has the ring in his pocket."

That these words should jar Lawrence unpleasantly, was unaccountable; that he should say good-by with a touch of coldness to Ruth, unreasonable; and leave with a feeling of depression, foolish. Yet so it was.



## CHAPTER XV

It was raining hard. Lawrence, with De Cenantes, had been trying a new automobile in the Bois, and when the downpour commenced had gone into the Châlet du Lac. They found a table in the glass-enclosed corridor, and over Scotch-and-soda for Lawrence, and an *amer-picon*, well diluted, for the little count, they made themselves comfortable.

They were almost alone in the place, for the day had been threatening, and the carriages few on the Avenue des Acacias. Lawrence tilted his chair against the wall and gazed at the lake. The sky was black except at the west, where an electric band flashed out and made the waters like a bed of quicksilver. Victorias with aprons drawn went darkly past.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

The red-coated orchestra, while yawning, played spiritlessly, "*Connais-tu le pays ?*"

"This place is *triste*," said De Cenantes, "and do you know, Brundage, *mon cher*, you are as quiet these days as a philosopher or a moonstruck boy, I don't know which. You are more quiet than an Englishman, and I'd give a good deal to know what's in your mind," he added, tapping his cane against his pointed boot in time to the music.

"You couldn't help me. No Frenchman could," said Lawrence, with a friendly sneer. "Shall I tell you? I'm thinking of the mystery called 'falling in love,' the 'divinest and deepest of human intuitions,' as some one has called it."

"And you think I'm not an authority. My dear Brundage, I'm always in love."

"You're speaking of '*l'amour*.' I'm speaking of the attraction called 'love' in Saxon countries, an instinct that is marvelous, inscrutable, an intuitive selection, unfathomable, compelling, before which your cold reason



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

may stand aghast, but which is borne down by it as Niagara snatches up a feather."

"You frighten me. What a profound reflection. Do I know the woman? Is it that little widow—Bacon?—Dakon?"

"You wanted my thoughts at the moment. I've given them. But if I want a father confessor I'll look elsewhere."

After this his silence continued, and no raillery or innuendo drew him to utter his thoughts again.

He was due at Mrs. Dakon's that night for bridge whist and supper. He was going only to see Ruth, just as he had gone a dozen times since the day he watched her driving bare-headed among the tall flowers. Sometimes he had found her with her mother's friends, at other times she had not appeared, or had come in only as he was leaving.

As he was driven to the Avenue Montaigne at ten, the lights of Paris, the clouds in the sky, the roll of the wheels, and the beating of his heart were all moving, twinkling, throbbing



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

to one question: Would Ruth be there? He felt himself "the weary well," "the broken brook" of Stevenson's poem, but she was the beginning of beautiful life, and all the faith and glamour he had lost glowed in her eyes. Then, too, how modern and human she was, pure without being prudish, and as tactful as a society veteran.

He thought of his last visit to Mrs. Dakon's, a few evenings before. There were a score of her friends there. He was silently, scorchingly critical of them. He knew some of the men as adventurers, and some of the women as well-plumaged, well-mannered birds of prey. He had burned with honest wrath to see Ruth among them; but what poise the girl had, and what a protection she was to her mother! It must have affronted her to see Mrs. Dakon saturate herself in the fumes of half a dozen cigarettes, smoked hilariously, while other women enjoyed one daintily without giving the act any spectacular effect; yet she lighted a match for her mother, and her



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

serene acceptance of the excess somehow extracted much of the objectionable from it. It must have humiliated her to see her mother do a Spanish dance, less graceful but as wild as Carmencita's, and sink breathless and shrieking into the arms of a student young enough to have been her son; yet she with the others applauded the dance. When she heard her mother tell her friends she had eloped from boarding-school at thirteen, no one dared by the flicker of an eyelash to seem to question it, for Ruth said gravely:

“And didn't Aunt Abby always say that when you had me in your arms you looked like a little girl with her doll? Didn't she, Noddy?”

This pleasant fiction, uttered so often, was seized on again with avidity.

“Yes,” Mrs. Dakon said triumphantly. “Every one was shocked at me. The clergyman that married us was very much criticized.”

Later, when he had caught sight of Ruth's hidden face as she stood alone in the hall, paler,



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

the eyes flashing with helpless chagrin, he realized how she loved her mother, and how she suffered through that love.

"Adorable, loyal bit of womankind," was Lawrence's thought as he went up the stairs. "Dear Ruth!"

A surprise awaited him when he was admitted by Étienne. The party had been postponed. Mrs. Dakon had a headache, and she was stretched in a reclining-chair in a wonderful buttercup-yellow tea-gown, her silver-gold hair lying in heavy Marguerite plaits over her shoulders. Ruth was reading aloud the news of the day from *La Patrie*.

"Yes, Larry, I let you come," Mrs. Dakon said, giving him one languid hand where many rings flashed while she held a huge gold scent-bottle to her nostrils with the other. "I made you an exception. A quiet evening with you could only be restful. But," with a self-conscious smile, "Stradhoff is coming in, too. I told him not to, but he persists. Russians are so fierce and determined."



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

In reality she had arranged for Stradhoff to be there, to play him against Lawrence. She felt that the Russian's melodramatic devotion must make her more valuable in the eyes of the only man for whom her heart had ever longed and ached sincerely.

Lawrence divined this, and after Stradhoff appeared, he was in no mood to play the part assigned to him. Instead, he talked with Ruth of the art school, of her friends, getting her views on life and books. She talked well, with flashes of wit, with touches of slang, the *argot* of the studio. She had none of that excessive and finely edged culture which suggests bloodlessness.

But the *tête-à-tête* was too delightful to be long enjoyed. Mrs. Dakon saw that all her ammunition was being wasted. Stradhoff hung over her and talked in burning whispers, and Lawrence, sitting beside the pink-globed lamp, his eyes on Ruth in her white gauze gown, saw nothing of it. It was too provoking. She called him to her on a pretense



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

of looking at some lines in her palm which had been read by a fashionable seer the day before. As he obeyed, Ruth stepped out on the balcony, beyond his sight. She seemed to take the light of the room with her.

He found her there when he went to say good night, and meant to linger over the saying of it as long as he could. She was in a low chair, her bare arms crossed behind her head.

"Are you going?" she said, rising. "Has—that man—Stradhoff gone?" she asked eagerly, looking into the room.

Stradhoff was fanning Mrs. Dakon, his nose about an inch from her cheek. Ruth gave her shoulders a twist, dislike and anxiety in her eyes.

"I hate that man," she confided to Lawrence in an intense undertone. "I feel a *malaise* when he's near me. Do you think Noddy cares for him?" she asked suddenly.

"A good deal, if one can judge by signs," Lawrence smiled.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

She struck her fist against her open hand.

“Child, what is it? Those troubled eyes!”  
said Lawrence.

She hesitated, looking over the silvered roofs of Paris, then said quickly:

“I’ll tell you. Noddy worries me.” The tones were hot and impatient, but the words that followed melted into wistful love. ‘I’m so afraid for her. At night I lie awake and wonder about her future. I wish she were safely married to some nice man, who’d love her really and be very kind to her.’”

A pang went through Lawrence. He longed to take Ruth in his arms and comfort her. For the moment, it was not the love of man for woman, but something kindred to the mother-love she had never known.



## CHAPTER XVI

MID-JUNE. Paris was sunny, breezy, fragrant, happy, its fountains sending up showers of liquid prisms to a smiling sky. Mrs. Dakon's cart was brought around at eleven, and with Étienne motionless as a bronze figure, as he sat behind her in his brown livery, she drove at a smart pace to the Bois.

According to the unwritten laws of the fashionable set, it was smart to ride these days in a summer habit and sailor hat at about ten, smart to drive your own cart at the hour for *déjeuner*, smart to be driven at five in a low-hung victoria up the Champs Élysées to the Bois, direct to the Avenue des Acacias and to no other place.

Mrs. Dakon did all these things. Only brute force could have made her step into



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

her cart in the afternoon, and never once had she left the treadmill of the Avenue des Acacias, where she was sure to pass the stars of the world and the half-world fifty times of an afternoon, for any of the much more beautiful drives stretching away in green perspective on every side. Any outsider criticizing this wearying sameness was met by a big, unanswerable stare, and the refrain that, to be *comme il faut*, these things, and these only, might be done.

She drove quickly, her eyes glancing from right to left. There was rebellious color on her pale, disciplined cheeks, her heart was flaming, and its glory had touched all that her eyes rested on.

She had just passed the Arc de Triomphe when she saw Professor Gunning sitting among the crowd under the trees. His hands were clasped over his stick; his eyes gazed ahead drearily. A fear that he might see her and follow in a *fiacre* made her touch Coquet sharply.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Not this morning, my dear Richard,” she thought, with a rush of ecstasy over her heart. “You’re a good soul, but prosy. How did I ever stand your long sentences, your elaborate compliments?”

She was watching for Lawrence among the horsemen that went by. An exquisite satisfaction possessed her. She would see him to-day. He had said yesterday that he meant to ride every morning, and would generally breakfast at the Pavilion d’Armenonville. The rest of the conversation occurred to her:

“I take Coquet out in the cart quite often, and I, too, go to Armenonville for breakfast. Strange I’ve never run across you there. So many people come up—one knows nearly every one.”

“I hope not,” he said teasingly.

“Oh, well, there are some I only know by sight, or repute.”

“Or disrepute. Do you take Ruth with you?”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Very seldom. She has only Sundays free, in the mornings. I don’t often take the cart out then, because I rest, as I go to the races so often in the afternoon.”

“So do I, quite often.”

“Then how have I missed seeing you?”

“I’ve not paid much attention to anything but the horses, with a lot of other men, you know. Next time I’ll look for you. Do you bet?”

“Oh, rather,” she said, her heart exultant as she saw a picture of many Sundays at Longchamps with Lawrence at her side for all to see; Lawrence, who, by reason of his millions and handsome face, could make any woman the fashion, if he chose.

“And Ruth,” he went on, “do you let her gamble?”

“Ruth does just as she pleases. Fancy *me* controlling Ruth. I’m such an irresponsible creature—and she’s anything but a tame *ingénue*, I assure you. She goes seldom, though. Our tastes are so different. She



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

likes things that bore me to extinction. In fact, she'd prefer a Sunday at Meudon with some of her painting chums to all the Long-champs in the world. Fancy! She doesn't care to do what's usual, you know."

"Ah," he said thoughtfully, and smiled. "But would you expect a girl with a mouth and eyes like hers to do the usual thing? Ruth is a free-lance. You may be sure she'll always prefer the untrodden path, and follow it if it seems good unto her."

The subject began to bore Nora. She wanted to talk of Armenonville and a *rendez-vous*.

"If to-morrow is a day like this," she had said, as he was leaving, "you may run across me under one of the trees."

"I wonder if I'll be so lucky," he murmured, in a speculative tone, and with an air as if his thoughts were far away.

After he was gone, she comforted herself with the thought that, despite his absent air, he would surely be there. That lazy, almost



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

impertinent indifference was merely a mannerism, and she had always thought it an attractive one. She sat in a dream for an hour. How good life had been to her, after all! When she had suffered so cruelly, when health had seemed gone, when the world had looked dour, and it had seemed as if nothing could ever interest her again, she had come to Paris and lived in a way congenial to her. Slowly the ache had gone away, so slowly, so gradually, she never knew when it had ceased to be; the years brought a lethal healing; she never saw Lawrence, she never heard his name. New interests had come; she had thought herself happy enough with Ruth, with her gay friends, and with a flirtation more or less serious to give a tang to the days.

So it had been until that night at *Les Deux Écoles*. Hate or love for Lawrence when with him were the only feelings possible to her. The old resentment had crept like a fanged thing into its lair, not to die, but to sleep, and she fancied an angel walked by her side,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

teaching her a lesson of forgiveness, charity, love.

Lawrence's many visits could mean but one thing: That now, at last, after twelve years, the old wrong was to be wiped out. She loved him with a reawakened tenderness which intensified with every familiar gesture and tone. She wondered if he loved her so, or if he was preparing to ask her to be his wife because he was a better man now, who felt it was the just thing to do. He did not look at her as in the old days. Doubtless the first ecstasy and the witchery that lie in the beginnings of love were gone from his heart never to be awakened again. But if his affection, his trust, his care were for her, surely she could be happy.

Yes, how good the world was, and how kind Fate had been to her. At forty she was a beauty still, slender, witching, with a face Time seemed only to kiss. Her lips curled in a smile that grew in radiance as she heard in fancy her marriage chimes ringing out the



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

last ghost of the tragic past, and saw herself in pearl-gray chiffon and a big picture-hat, vowing to "love, honor, and obey" Lawrence Brundage as long as she lived.

This was the dream that made her face bright as she turned Coquet up the drive to the restaurant, gave the reins to Étienne, and strolled to a table under a tree where Mrs. St. Leger sat with an English countess.

"Just in time, my dear," said Mrs. St. Leger. "You know Lady Merben? Now shall I order cocktails?"

"I'm game," said Mrs. Dakon, slowly drawing off her loose dogskins and looking around.

"I think they're such mucky things, you know," said Lady Merben.

"By the way, I saw Larry a few moments ago," said Mrs. St. Leger.

"Where's his table?"

"Not here. As I drove up he was going the other way at a great pace in his new hansom. 'Come to breakfast,' I called, as



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

he passed, but he shook his head. He looked as fit as you please."

To conceal her disappointment, Nora plunged into talk with a young officer that strolled up. The charm of the day had snapped. She longed to weep like an exasperated child.

Lawrence's hansom, after passing Mrs. St. Leger, continued down the Champs Élysées, across the Pont du Carrousel to the left side of the Seine, until, after many twistings, his man pulled up outside a musty little shop on the Rue des Saints Pères, whose windows were filled with a multitude of things—old brass, silver, china, bits of tapestry, dim paintings, old lace, missals, old boxes, prints—a fascinating collection.

The interior was like a wash-drawing in shadow, and smelled of old rose-leaves. Lawrence seemed alone in the place for a moment. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness he saw an old man rising from a table behind a big clock, his midday salad and long-necked



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

bottle of red wine spread upon the coarse, white cloth.

“ I want to see a certain little box you have here,” said Lawrence, seating himself on a Venetian couch. “ It is made of tortoise-shell, shaped like an old trousseau chest, clamped with gold and studded with some jewels. Just in the center there is a miniature said to be of the Duchesse de Choiseul. I want to see it.”

“ Monsieur may see it,” said the man, “ but it is not for sale.”

“ Why not? ”

“ It is rather a curious history,” he said, his dim eyes smiling, “ and I like such things. A young American lady has often come in here and looked at the box. Its price always seemed very great, though she knew its authentic history and that the box was well worth it. Ah, she was quite wild to have that box, and at last, the other day, we made a bargain. Every week she is to pay me twenty francs upon it.”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

He went to the back of the shop and returned with the treasure, which Lawrence saw was without doubt a genuine antique, an old Louis XV. jewel-case.

“You will sell me this box to-day,” he said to the dealer.

“Not for a hundred francs more, nor for two, monsieur. My word is given. The *demoiselle* is to make the first payment to-day.”

“But listen. The young lady’s birthday is to-morrow, and I want to give it to her. How now, my friend?”

The old man shrugged, and a whimsical smile went over his face.

“Very good, providing you give it to her here before me. That is business. She will be here at five o’clock.”

Half an hour before that time Lawrence returned, paid for the box, and with it beside him, waited for Ruth. If he had shut his eyes to the knowledge of what these past weeks had achieved, he could evade the truth no longer as he saw her crossing the street



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

in the sunlight. The magnolia paleness of her childish face, the warmth and hope in her eyes! His heart beat heavily, and a breeze that pained swept along his nerves.

“Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,  
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew.”

The words were Stevenson’s but the music to which these were set was born in the depths of a glorious, unreckoning love.

When Ruth saw him, the color went over her face.

“You came to see my treasure, my find?” she asked, bending over the box, opening it, and smelling the faded red silk of that exact tint which only the alchemy of age can give. “I didn’t say too much about its beauty, now, did I?”

“I’m glad you like my box,” Lawrence smiled, leaning nearer to her, the impudence that many women had found attractive in his long gaze.

“Yours?” said Ruth, facing him.—“Mon-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

sieur Dorblette, have you sold my box?" she asked in tones that quivered with reproach.

"I think monsieur will explain," and he withdrew discreetly.

Lawrence was looking at her with a serious tenderness which troubled her heart.

"I wanted you to have something you really longed for, little Ruth, and when you told me the other day of this antique, and your plan for buying it, it gave me an inspiration. Besides, to-morrow is your birthday."

"How did you know?" she said, dazed and happy, her dimple deepening as he placed the box in her hands.

"Your mother told me. It's a pity, though, that this should be empty," he ventured. "Isn't there an old proverb about disaster attending an empty box or purse? I think a string of pearls just long enough to clasp your throat—such a little string—just the thing, too, for you to wear at the countess' dance next week——"

She gave a laugh of childish delight.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Don’t dazzle me. Haven’t you been magician enough for one day? I longed so for this. Oh, how good you are to give it to me!”

“You shall have the pearls, too,” he said decidedly. “And they shall each be as large as the tears you are never to shed,” he added, with a gentleness that delighted and touched her.

“What a pretty thing to say! You know how to say such very pretty things,” she added, with a questioning movement of her brows.

“Which means—what? That you think me almost a professional maker of compliments?” he asked sadly.

“Oh, no,” she laughed. “Had you lived when this was made,” holding up the box, “they would have said you had ‘a pretty wit.’”

Instructions were left with the dealer to have the box taken to the address in the Avenue Montaigne, and Lawrence suggested driving Ruth in his hansom wherever she wished.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"Anywhere but home, for an hour at least," he added, as he handed her in.

"I know," she said impulsively. "It's a holy day, I think. Let's go to Notre Dame for a little while. I love it. I love the hush, the music, the age of it. I haven't been there in months."

Had Ruth suggested the morgue, Lawrence's readiness would have been just as enthusiastic. It mattered nothing where the horse took him, so that he could see the face that had come to mean happiness to him.

"Look! Don't you love it, too?" she asked, as Notre Dame's blanched, gray sides came into view in the sunlight. "See the sparrows whirling from gargoyles to gargoyles, chattering all the time," she laughed softly, leaning her folded hands on the apron of the hansom. "I always think those little sparrows so cheeky. Think of those brown, fluffy, tiny things flirting with Notre Dame!"

"They have no respect for age," he said,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

and added after a pause: "I hope you haven't, either."

"Why?"

"I'd feel horribly sorry if I thought you respected me," he said.

She made a skeptical face, and the dimple flickered in her cheek.

"I almost do. Don't you want me to?"

"No. If I'm respected, I'm set apart on a chilling altitude. Mountain air never agrees with me."

She faced him fully.

"Have you been a very, very bad man? I know that men may be very wicked and yet be thought very nice. Noddy's friends are like that," she said.

"I hope I'm not like some of Noddy's friends. I've never cheated at cards, and I know that one— But there, I won't talk scandal. Tell me, Ruth," he said suddenly, and with a personal earnestness, "is the man you dream of, your ideal, a Sir Galahad?"

She shook her head.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“You think me very young and ignorant and childish, but I’ve learned to know a great deal about life, being in Paris and looking after Noddy as I’ve always done. You see, a girl gets to know. Then, in the school—you should hear how they talk there! It’s quite the fashion to be thought a cynic about everything—and then some things have happened there”— She broke off, her pretty brow drawn in a line of thought. “No, if I have an ideal, he’s not a Sir Galahad. I detest perfect people. I like people to have faults. I have so many.”

“Where do you hide them?”

“Oh! I’m often nasty and jealous, and I’ve often hurt people that liked me. Then, I love to shock these cold, narrow people who imagine that going to church makes them Christians. One sort of goodness is intolerable to me.”

“Your charity is so wide, Ruth. Could you forgive a man you loved a great deal?”

“It wouldn’t matter what he did before I



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

knew him—I mean in the way of morals—if he was never dishonorable or cruel. But I should want his future all mine, and my standard of honor, his.”

“You could understand the horrible force of some temptations, with weakness and selfishness following?”

“Yes.”

“I knew you could,” he said as if to himself.

“And all this time you have not answered my impertinent question,” said Ruth. “But I shouldn’t have asked you. You needn’t tell me. Why should you?”

“I want to,” he said simply. “I’m glad your question was asked in the past tense. I’m not what I was, I’m not, indeed. Perhaps this is not so much to my credit. As far as what is termed sin goes, I’m a languid watcher at a feast for which I’ve no longer any appetite. But I’ve eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. It’s bitter at the core. We only find it out after the eating.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"You are something like Rochester, in 'Jane Eyre,'" said Ruth.

"Isn't he very popular with very young women?" he laughed, his mood changing.

"Oh, fascinating," Ruth admitted, and then colored vividly, laughing too.

"I probably suggest him a little, because the edges of my hair are getting melodramatically gray. Soon I'll be able to quote with more point:

"In youth my hair was black as night,  
My life as white as driven snow.  
As white as snow my hair is now,  
And that is black which once was white."

The hansom stopped at the church doors.

"I'm glad I'm with you to-day, Ruth," he said. "I haven't been in church in years."

The shadow and coolness of the great sanctuary were like hands shutting out the working, sunshiny world and drawing them in to prayer. Purple and cerise bars from the high windows lay on the white floor; a priest's in-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

toning with a sad, falling note came distantly from beyond the scrolled brass gates before the altar; up in the marble dome there were faint, trembling chimes.

Lawrence and Ruth paced down the side aisle together. He was looking at her face. A dreamy penitence for all his past sins surged through him as a lazy wave steals up the sands and falls back inertly. Her crystal purity, not born of ignorance, made him ashamed. It was a new feeling. If she really knew life as he had lived it! She could talk of a man having sinned; but if she *knew* what it meant! He put the thought away and watched her.

They were passing the stations of the cross and had paused at one: "Christ Comforts the Weeping Women." A tenderness toward all women suffused him. He understood better than ever before how Nature had marked them for suffering—their frail bodies, tender hearts, the tragedy that can lie in motherhood. His love went out to Ruth with yearning. Some day she would suffer, as all women must, in



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

the spirit and the flesh. He looked at her hands—dear, childish hands! at her body, slender, like a sapling; at her eyes, knowing no sorrow yet, save a reflection of others'. If he could keep suffering from her always! If he could only make her happy for every moment of her life! He knew that this was love, the longing to give to another, to protect, to bless another. Self was in chains, its clamorous tongue silent.

Ruth looked at him and saw he was thoughtful. They did not speak, but silently and slowly circled the church, going back of the altar and reaching the other side. Here, in a shadowy niche, an old woman in black sat, a heap of blessed candles of various sizes before her, a twinkling pyramid of them on iron spikes burning beside her, and at a little distance, bent praying figures, some almost prone, but with eyes lifted to the lights.

Ruth led the way to isolated, secluded seats with kneeling stools before them.

“Wait here,” she whispered, and left him.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

He saw her go to the woman, buy a candle, light it herself from one of those burning and place it on a spike. She knelt down near it, and he watched the light from a window make crimson stains on her bent neck just below her ear. The candle was half burned when she returned to him, her lips quivering.

"I never can resist them," she said, after a pause, very softly, for they were so far from the rest their whispers could not be heard. "There is one I always burn a candle for. There is one I always pray for."

"Do you?" he asked. "Some one you love? I envy that person."

"Some one who is dead," she murmured, in a tone of such pitying, passionate love Lawrence thrilled to hear it. "In our church we are taught that prayers for the dead are futile. I cannot think so. At least the dead may know that we remember and pray. I always pray for my father."

The simple, yearning words were like an insult flung in his face. He had been reveling



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

in a cloudy repentance for a fashionably immoral life. This girl had been praying for her father. His blood grew hot when he remembered what the years had so obligingly nullified. But the thought was so unpleasant, so hostile to all his present longings and underlying determination, he would not look upon its face. After all, Ruth had been but a child. She knew nothing but the mere fact—could never know—and he had made what amends he could to her mother. He need not feel so guilty—he would not. Who could have supposed that Anthony Dakon would have taken the loss of his foolish little wife's love *au grand sérieux*?

But Ruth was speaking again:

“You knew my father?”

“Yes.”

“You were his best friend.”

“Don't speak of this.” He moved uneasily.

“It's so long ago. It can only make you unhappy.”

“It's not so long ago to me,” she said in



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

bitter pain, and her lashes fell. "I think of him. I wonder about him. Oh, how I loved him! I wish I had been older. Perhaps I could have helped him. Perhaps I could have made him know how much he was to me." Her head sank on her hand. "Why did he kill himself? Do you know?"

"It was a mystery to every one," he blurted.

"What could have made him so unhappy? He was poor, but he had Noddy, and he had me. I sorrow for him. Oh, if I could have him back!" She turned to him, her eyes a blur of tears. "Noddy never will speak of him. Oh, tell me something about him! You knew him so well."

"I—I don't know what to say."

"You knew him at college. Tell me about him—anything—tell me of your life together there."

"I can't," he said fiercely.

She was silent, then he felt her cold hand stealing into his, felt it nestle there, the small fingers winding themselves about his.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“I see. It hurts you,” she said, a new tenderness in her eyes. “You loved him, too.”

When, a few moments later, they went into the sunlight, Lawrence’s face was white. He was breathing like one who had run from danger.



## CHAPTER XVII

HE ought to go away. He ought to leave Paris at once. He saw this very clearly. If he had a finer sense of honor, he would; or if this new feeling had not become as tentacles around his heart, he would. But he could not go—no, he could not. Merely to fancy putting land and sea between him and Ruth made him know a sense of loss that touched the marrow of desolation.

He believed she could love him. She would go by his side and transform the world for him. Without her, how well he knew it in the length and breadth of its flatness, staleness, unprofitableness. With her, he would taste again the rapture of living in golden days made warm with love. By and by—not so many years hence, alas!—he would find with



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

her a sweet, sane companionship in his old age. And to sacrifice this happiness to a too acute conscientiousness, stifle it because of a tragedy into which he had been drawn by a chance grouping of circumstances, was too much to expect of a man that knew life as he knew it.

He was walking fast along the lighted boulevards, though blind to the street scenes through which he passed. In thought it was the afternoon; he was again in Notre Dame, and Ruth's cold, small hand, like silk to the touch, was slipping into his, nestling there, winding its fingers about his. Her eyes, a blur of tears, were turned to him, full of enchanting tenderness. He would not dwell upon the fact that the touch and the look were both for her father's friend, his best friend, who had loved him.

She should never hear the old story of a man's selfishness, a woman's weakness, with the blood of the wronged one smeared across the page. Only her mother knew it, and she, for her own sake, would be silent. No hint



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

should resurrect that past wherein he had wantonly broken faith with two. Mrs. Dakon, no doubt, would be passively pleased to have him marry herself, the finish that a sentimental novelist would think proper for a love history like theirs; but since that was not to be, no doubt she would be rejoiced to give Ruth and him her blessing, because he was a "catch," and Mrs. Dakon was not above considering it a triumph to capture for her daughter a fortune like his.

After the long walk in the night mists which left him dazed and fatigued on the stairwayed pavement of Montmartre, he was more dogged in the determination to do all that a man could do to win Ruth than when he had set out upon it. It was his nature to combat the good in him when it rose as a barrier between himself and his appetites. The protesting voice made him perversely array every argument that self could voice against it. Years before, Nora's flight from The Lawns had changed his hesitancy into an attack that had beaten down her



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

scruples. Ruth's words to-day had raised the ghost of his most regretted sin, and it had whispered to him to go from her because he was unworthy. The result was a determined resistance to it, a spelling of his unfitness backward, till he had convinced himself that since the tragedy had not been of his planning nor desire, and Ruth would never know of this page in his life and her mother's, it would be quixotic to sacrifice his life's happiness to an overniceness. He would stay. But he was sufficiently sensitive to let several days pass before he saw Ruth again.

Those three days were bearing different fruit for the two that watched for his coming in the Avenue Montaigne. Mrs. Dakon was being continually confronted by a new idea, which she as obstinately pushed back. It had a look to make her shudder. Was Lawrence Brundage attracted to Ruth? It had come to her first when she heard that Lawrence had been purchasing the old jewel box in the Rue des Saints Pères, while she had lunched at



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Armenonville, where she had kept a nervous watch for him, though feeling he would not come.

She put it from her as almost humorous. Such a thing was absurd. He had happened to be on the other side of the Seine; he had happened to remember Ruth speaking of the box. Of course, he was fond of the girl. Was she not her daughter? The thought came again, however, when the necklace of pearls was delivered to Ruth with his card. *She* had no pearls. It was hard for her to mask her amazement, anger, and envy. The suspicion that had been tormenting her like the sting of a gnat changed to a racking fear. She could not bear to look at Ruth, who loved the pearls, who put them on and off continually. Lawrence had said they would be "as big as tears." Ruth did not dream the covetous tears were her mother's, shed at night in the dark, while she slept.

Ruth also watched for Lawrence's coming. She was electrically alive with a new happi-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

ness. She did not try to solve it, but a song went with her all day; her mind strayed from her work in the school; she walked through the sunlight, alone, happy with her thoughts, silent when with others, an underconsciousness of joy and expectancy going with her. She had a radiant air, her face was awakened, her green eyes under her lashes dreamed and glowed.

The first time Lawrence appeared others were there, at tea-time, on the balcony. Ruth knew the truth about herself as she trembled when his hand touched hers. She could not speak. A feeling of ecstasy choked her. As soon as she could, she slipped away to her room and stood by the window, seeing nothing. There was something of defeat in the rapture that shook her. She loved this man. What she had seen make a weakling of Tom, a quivering dependent on her moods and glances, had conquered her. Her future, for good or ill, was in Lawrence Brundage's keeping. The thought swept through her like a storm under which her heart ached. She



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

would not have surrendered that pang for fifty lives of such content as had been hers before this hour.

Mrs. Dakon had learned something, too, as she regarded Lawrence from this new point of view. She saw he was hardly aware of her presence. He was *distract*, and only replied when directly addressed. He kept a furtive watch on the door through which Ruth had passed. He loved her daughter. The realization overpowered her. She struggled with its immensity. Clear thought was impossible.

“What am I to do?” She asked herself this continually. She did not know.

They were going to the Countess de Berrode’s dance. This was four nights after Lawrence’s visit, and Mrs. Dakon had done nothing, said nothing. She was drifting, watching, and her nervousness increased. Ruth’s transfigured face became an affront to her. To see her moving about in radiance, to hear her playing love-songs in the twilight—Schubert’s “Serenade,” with a new mean-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

ing to the passionate phrases—turned her to a fury.

She would go to her room, and, standing by the mantel, sink her teeth into the wood, or tear her handkerchief and moan. And—those pearls! *She* had no pearls. Twenty times she was on the point of commanding their return as too expensive, a most unfitting gift to a young girl. But she had sagacity enough to know that both would have thought such an objection ridiculous from her, whose life was so whimsically unconventional, and who was at all times such a nice appraiser of the cost of gifts. She feared to betray herself. So Ruth wore the pearls to the countess's dance.

Mrs. Dakon had always thought her very pretty and fascinating, but never a beauty like herself. To-night there was a splendor wrapping the girl that was amazing. She was a magnificent young creature, whose illusions seemed to make a glow about her. A smile hovered about her warmly colored nicked lips; her eyes held a deep light; her face was of a



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

glittering pallor, as if from a hidden radiance. The gown she wore was of white tulle, with flesh-pink roses lying against its mist and twining around her naked shoulders, and above the flowers the big, satiny pearls made her throat lustrous.

Mrs. Dakon stared at her and then went to her own mirror. Her eyes searched it for comfort, but she found none. Her costly, beautiful gown was like a shimmering coat of mail from which her bust and shoulders rose like ivory. There were diamonds in her hair. But between them both, the anxious face, the hungry eyes. She tasted anguish.

The frosted lamps, alight on each side of the marble steps, made two white paths in the countess's garden. Outside the vine-wreathed wall, Paris scintillated like a starry sky, but here among the trees there were nooks of woodland quiet.

The second waltz was over. Mrs. Dakon and Tom Cautley came down the steps together, while a strain of "Artist's Love" still



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

quivered from the violins. They passed to a seat against the wall, facing the house. For the first time in his acquaintance with her, Mrs. Dakon had no coqueties or graces. She was heavy, cold, unsmiling. She gave him no attention. Leaning her elbow on her shut fan, she sat forward and gazed at the drawing-room windows. Tom looked at her cold, grave face.

“So, the game’s all up with me,” he said thoughtfully.

“What do you mean?” she asked, a shrinking look in her eyes. She dreaded hearing him ratify her own thoughts.

“You know it is. Don’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that Brundage and Ruth——”

“Don’t say that!” The words were not more than a breath, but fierce and bitter. “Don’t say it!” she said wildly.

“Why, I supposed you’d be glad of it,” said Tom, with a miserable laugh. “You’ll find few mothers objecting to millionaires for their



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

daughters. Brundage is so rich the vowels of his name fairly chink."

Mrs. Dakon passed her hand over her lips. She found it difficult to speak.

"There isn't a shadow of truth in it," she said at length, in a breathless flurry. "Not the faintest shadow. What makes you think so?" she asked, the tone becoming suddenly anxious.

"Their faces to-night."

"Is that all?"

"The pearls he gave her, the flowers he sent. She carries his roses to-night. They match those on her gown. He knew what she was going to wear. My poor lilies are left at home. If this isn't enough, then let me say I feel it. In fact, I felt it from that first day on the balcony. The gods have been good to Lawrence Brundage. Men like him. Women love him. He's a man to win."

Mrs. Dakon twisted on her seat. Her hands fluttered. She kept moistening her lips.

"You're fanciful. You're absurd. Ruth's a child to Lawrence Brundage, just a little



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

child. You don't know what you're saying. Why, it's funny, it's really funny. Such a thing couldn't be. It couldn't be."

"Couldn't it? There are all the elements of possibility in it," he said bitterly, "just because he is what he is, and just because she's Ruth."

The countess's nephew, an officer in sky-blue, found them out and bore Mrs. Dakon away for the dance just forming. Tom waited, and then decided to "cut it." To watch Ruth dancing with Brundage, with a look on her face never called there by him, was intolerable. He found his hat and left the place.

From the Rue de Chaillot he walked down until he reached the Jardin de Paris. At a table under the trees he had a liqueur and many cigarettes. But he didn't see the stars above the trees nor the lamps among them, nor hear the sugary voices of various brightly dressed young women, who seemed anxious to make his a *solitude à deux*.

In fancy he saw himself dead and really



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

looking very handsome, with Ruth weeping remorsefully over his coffin, wringing her hands and wishing she had been kinder to him before it was too late. This picture made him feel unutterably sorry for himself as a dead man, but it had a dreary satisfaction of its own, since by it Ruth was to love him, though too late. Tom was very young.

At the countess's the dance swung on. After a fourth waltz, a thing he had not done for ten years, Lawrence brought Ruth into the garden. He folded a scarf of chiffon around her and looked steadily into her raised eyes, his lingering touch on her cool shoulders. There was a pagan joy of life in her face. A magnetism that words would have profaned enfolded them. They walked on in silence to a seat shut in by bushes covered with yellow, twinkling flowers that poured a delicate fragrance into the night.

He took her hand and drew her to the seat. Her palm throbbed against his like the beating of her heart. She was under a spell which



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

led her to a foreordained end. She could not have broken the silence between them by a breath. The cry of his need of her was all that his lips could speak.

The words came at last. He did not look at her, but he held her hand as he would the help that was to keep him from sinking to certain death. When the last, halting, passionate syllable of that prayer left his lips he turned his eyes to hers.

Her face was bending nearer, her lips were parted. Without a word she kissed him. The happiness of it beggared every sensation of his life. He was as a god throned. Life was perfect.



## CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. DAKON's face had acquired a curious expression. It boded something important. The eyes were inquiring, the lips grim. Without appearing to, she kept a close watch on Ruth. Something had happened, of that she felt sure, for Ruth's joy was too passionate not to betray itself in signs. She was restless; or she would sit apart, dreaming; often her face wore an unconscious smile.

Two days after the ball, when Mrs. Dakon returned from her drive at half past six o'clock, she saw Lawrence just driving from her doors. He had called; they had seen each other alone. She was enraged, yet knew she must be silent. She caught up her skirts and fairly ran up the stairs. Étienne was just en-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

tering, and held open the door for her, without her having to ring. She rushed in, but with a stealthy quiet. Ruth was on the balcony. As she peered at her through the rose silk curtains, she saw her wave her hand.

The gesture turned her flesh cold as she remembered a day, long ago, when she, poised to renounce everything because of love for this man, had stood on the dusty country road and waved good-by to him. Venom poured into her heart, and as her keen, scared eyes watched her daughter still, she saw her slip something shining into her bosom. It was a ring.

When Ruth came into the *salon*, her mother was in her room, taking off her hat. Ruth could see her as she passed down the hall to dress for dinner, and called out a greeting:

“Hello, Noddy!”

She longed to tell her mother. She was burning for the moment when she could fling herself upon her heart and whisper her glorious secret. Lawrence had made her promise



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

to let him see her mother first, and he was coming to-morrow.

They did not dine together. Mrs. Dakon complained of a headache, and, after her habit, when she had headaches, whether fictitious or real, she barricaded herself in her room with her smelling-salts, a hot-water bottle and her maid in attendance. Every sound had to be muffled. No callers were to be admitted.

Ruth endured the lamp-lit *salon* and the silence as long as she could. Her blood was tingling and called for action. She felt stifling there. After pacing up and down a while, she put on a white silk coat over her low gown, and a hat with roses bending down its brim, and went up to Professor Gunning's. Perhaps he would take her out. She must have space, air, movement; she must feel the breeze on her face, feel the rush of the city which held Lawrence as one of its atoms. To the whir of the electric bell, however, came a servant, who said his master was out. Ruth came slowly down the stairs, paused at her own



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

apartment, and then, flinging the reins to the impulse which goaded her, went rapidly down to the street-door.

She felt a wildness in her blood. The shadowy, quiet avenue, with the lights of the Rond Point flashing and winking at a little distance, invited her to follow her caprice. She had never been alone on a Paris street after dark, and the sensation as she walked to the curb was sheer, wilful joy, as tingling as a draught of wine. When a dawdling *fiacre* came in sight she hailed it.

"*Aux boulevards!*" she said, mimicking the nasal voice and burry pronunciation popularly supposed by Europeans to be the only true American accent, while laughter bubbled within her. She did this for a purpose. Ruth knew the French point of view about American demoiselles. They might do almost anything and not be misjudged. The French gave them up as unsolvable riddles, and treated them with much outward politeness, much inward criticism.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

She knew this *cocher*, who repeated "*Aux boulevards*" after her with an informing air which corrected her pronunciation, would pilot her safely, be amazed at nothing, and deliver her home again with as much respect as he would an intricate explosive he did not understand.

"He thinks I'm mad, anyway, so I might as well take off my hat and be happy," Ruth thought, in a spirit of mischief.

Alone in the open carriage, feeling an independence and joy that made her toes nervous, she was driven down the Rue de Rivoli to the Rue Royale and thence to the boulevards. Here the summer crowd was thick; the lights were spitting among the trees; there was music near and far; the loungers were packed at the tables under the awnings; the kiosks were pillars of golden light; the fronts of theaters were squares of electric brilliants; and as she flung her head back, above it all, over the big, gray houses was the tranquil, violet sky, misty with stars.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Sharp breaths of pleasure ran through Ruth. She was a truant, a vagabond. The memory of another night came to her, when she had also flung off the burden of the conventions, parental law, and a galling respectability. She was seven years old then, and her brain was charged with the fairy lore her father used to read to her. Fairies came out in the moonlight when the big clock on the village church boomed twelve. They made ladders of the pearls of dew on the rose-bushes. They had their flower-petal feasts on the mushrooms that grew in the cold, wet shadows. They plucked stars for their wands and capered on moon-rays.

All this she had been told many, many times. The thought had made her brain spin, made her heart jump; and yet mortals like her father and mother, her nurse and Hannah, could shut the doors on the moonlight, and in dark rooms, like big boxes, go fast asleep. They did not care for the fairy carnival in the dews and moon-mists. They did not want to see the lit-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

tle, glittering things come creeping, creeping, creeping from the unknown places where they hid by day. They did not want to watch them meet, join hands, and spin around with fairy joy. Wonder of wonders! they did not want to hear a fairy's laugh, which must be as tiny and tender as the sound that would come if a hyacinth could tinkle.

Ruth remembered herself sitting up in the dark, her eyes round and rigid, and there declaring silent anarchy. *They* did not want to see these wonderful things? *She did*. Without more pause, she had tumbled, a soft, downy bundle, from her cot and gathered up her nightgown, which was very long, until she reached the bedroom door, where she had to drop it to use both hands in turning the knob. With the caution and quiet of an inquisitive mouse, she reached the lower floor. She knew she could not open the door, but she remembered a small pantry window not far from the ground that could be reached by climbing among bread boxes on the shelf.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

With care and difficulty she carried a chair to the shelf, pushed up the little window, and now, breathing hard from the fatigue of her labors, climbed from it and hung by her hands.

Ruth laughed now as she recalled the sudden terror that seized her and kept her hanging there. "Suppose, when I let go, I come *plump* on a fairy!" It was a terrifying thought, but she chanced it, and then making soft, cooing sounds of comfort, searched among the grasses lest one gauzy little darling should be prostrated there with a broken wing. She remembered how, when she looked up and saw her own garden with the neighbor's pasture beyond, both quite different from their daytime selves in the moon-wash and shadow quiverings, what a naughty, reckless ecstasy was hers, and how difficult it was to keep back the shriek her untrammelled soul wanted to send forth as, in her bare feet, she raced through the wet grass to look for the fairy revelers of this wonderland.

She was as much of a rebel to-night, her



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

senses just as turbulent. She might have to pay some price for her escapade to-morrow, as she did for that seven-year-old lawlessness, for she had been found by her father in the dawn, asleep against an old well, the beginnings of croup in her throat; but Ruth flicked her brows and felt happy, as the *fiacre* jogged on.

When the Place de la République was reached the *cocher* asked her if she wanted to continue on to the Place Bastille. No, she thought not. The *fiacre* was stopped while she pondered. This probably was all she might dare do alone, and it was a long drive back. She told him to turn and retrace his way along the boulevards, still mimicking a labored pronunciation and twang. The journey back was just as pleasant, but it was marred by the thought that she was going home, and it was only half-past ten. How little a girl dare do, after all!

But as she passed a *café* not far from the Madeleine, she saw Tom sitting on the outer



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

edge at a table, alone. His empty glass was beside him, his straw hat back on his head. He was hugging one knee and smoking. In a twinkling Ruth had given the order to stop. She put her hat on discreetly and made a dart through the crowd to his side.

"Tom," she said, and he looked up with a most unbelieving stare, "come with me. Come quickly."

She raced back, and, without a word, he followed her into the *fiacre*, which went on very slowly.

"What's up? Is your mother ill?"

"No, nothing's wrong," she said, her fingers clutching his sleeve. "Everything's right, Tom. I've run away."

"Ruth—what can—" he stammered.

"I've run away for just three hours," she said. "Now do you understand? For nearly twelve years I've lived here and have curbed many a longing for a wandering alone, in the night, not tucked under anybody's arm, but alone, alone. Well, I've had it, Tom. I've



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

been tooling about for an hour and a half seeing the sights. There's just another hour and a half to be disposed of. You shall entertain me. Tell the *cocher* to take us to the Bal Bullier. It's Thursday night."

"I won't," said Tom, with a stolid seriousness. "You must be mad. Of all places, Bullier! You'd probably run into a dozen of the fellows there. It would be bad enough with a chaperon—but alone!"

"Yes, you're right. Then we'll go down the Boul' Miche', and you'll let me have just a blissful ten minutes at a little table with you?"

Tom was grave, and beyond the reach of entreaties.

"You're not going to that side at all. I'll take you about on this side, if you insist. We'll go over Clichy way, though why you want to see all this sort of disreputable thing I can't understand."

"My dear Thomas," said Ruth gaily, as the bewildered *cocher* again turned his horse and went back along the boulevards, "I don't



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

know what sort of thing I want to see; I only know I want to *see!* ”

“ You’re in a mad mood to-night,” he said, looking at her inquiringly. “ Do you mind in the least knowing that under that *cocher’s* glazed hat, in whatever he has that does service as a brain, is the rooted idea that you are not respectable? ”

Ruth laughed with the frankest delight.

“ Oh, I never thought I’d have such a delicious moment! I wish I could see his face. Poor man, it’s a shame to confuse his moral values, isn’t it? ”

As they turned into the narrow, up-hill Rue Blanche, Tom sighed heavily.

“ You’re in the seventh heaven over something. What is it? What makes you so happy, Ruth? ”

“ Everything,” she said evasively. “ Being here with you——”

“ Is it that? Is it really that? ” he asked, the love leaping to his voice, as he seized her hand.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“No, it isn’t,” she said in a subdued tone, and drew her hand away very decidedly. “I shouldn’t have said so.”

His face darkened and grew sad.

“It isn’t that at all, not in the least—is it?” he asked, after a pause.

“Now, Tom, please say no more. Don’t begin! Don’t spoil my evening,” said Ruth angrily.

“Don’t begin? You infer that I’m a nuisance, that I bore you,” he said as hotly. “Yet you’re not blameless. You’ve encouraged me.”

Ruth had not counted on this turn to the conversation. She looked annoyed, resigned, and sank back mute. It was too bad Tom’s insistence should spoil the dreaming of Lawrence which companioned her.

“I’ve never encouraged you,” she said quietly, with chilling distinctness. “I’ve always taken pains to tell you the truth—that I feel friendship for you, and nothing else.”

“Oh, yes, you’ve told me that. But your



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

eyes have sometimes had quite another language.” He leaned toward her abruptly and spoke entreatingly. “Really, Ruth, you have looked at me sometimes as if you loved me. Are you sure—are you sure you don’t?”

Only a native kindness of heart kept her from laughing her amaze.

“I’m quite sure I don’t, and that I never shall,” she said.

Nothing more was said for a few moments.

“Can you say you care nothing for Lawrence Brundage?” he asked, in quick tones of arraignment.

Ruth lifted her head high.

“I’m saying nothing at all. I’m treating the question with the silence its impudence deserves,” she said coldly.

“The silence is sufficient. You needn’t tell me,” Tom burst out, and continued wildly. “You love him. He loves you. I know it. I’ve seen it coming. I believe he’s told you about it, and it’s this that makes you happy tonight. I said he loves you, but I should have



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

said he feels for you what he calls love. He *couldn't* love you."

"Couldn't he?" she asked, still coldly.

"He couldn't love you as I do."

"You rather block your own perspective, naturally."

"Well, sneer as you like. It's true. He's well past forty, and his heart is like an urn of ashes. He's a tomb of memories——"

"Aren't your similes rather graveyardy? Surely you can do better."

"I know his sort," Tom continued miserably, running amuck in his despair. "Tired eyes, grayish hair, bored manner, purple pasts—a round dozen of them—and the cheek to ask a sweet, pure girl to take him as a husband!"

"The sweet, pure girl can refuse him if she doesn't want him, you know." Her cold calm was now perfect.

Tom had been chewing the cud of misery for days. He could not be politic. His pain swept him on.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“When he’s broken your heart—as he will, mind you, as he will”—he choked—“you’ll remember how I’ve loved you.” They had reached the top of the steep, cobblestoned street. “Here’s Clichy, now,” he said mournfully. “All the *cafés* are disreputable. There’s the Rat Mort, and we’ll pass the Moulin Rouge in a minute. This is the sort of thing you wanted to see, I suppose?”

“You’ve quite robbed me of any desire to see anything but my home,” she said in open wrath. “Tell him to turn back, and to go quickly, quickly.”

Tom obeyed, feeling that a closed gate in Ruth’s heart was now locked against him.

The *cocher* turned his head and gave them one long, eloquent stare of disgust. He had been twisting and turning ever since this American miss had started, and had been hoping for a *bock* at some *café* where they would pause; but now it was “*Tournez, tournez, et vite.*” He beat his horse down the Rue Blanche again to muttered curses against all



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Americans as "fools, pigs, and dogs of the street."

Ruth parted from Tom without another word than a chill "Good night."



## CHAPTER XIX

TOM kept house with Andy Norton in an apartment on the Rue de Medicis, overlooking the Luxembourg Gardens. In its courtyard there were flowering bushes, and fountains in age-mellowed marble basins; and within its walls the things that spelled convenience and well-being—excellent attendance, bath-rooms, and an *ascenseur*. Tom was one of that minute army of fortunates, an art student with a large income to pay for the comforts of the Philistine. On the top floor, replete with skylights, he had transformed the big *salon* into an *atelier*; because he wanted a chum he had taken in Andy, who paid a very small share of the expenses; a motherly, Normandy peasant, whose soups were the talk of the *ateliers*, looked after them well.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

After parting from Ruth, Tom had the exasperated *cocher* take him home. His heart was heavy. He felt his first distaste for life. He began to understand the bitter smile he had seen flit over the faces of old men when he had exulted in existence and had anticipated and arranged his future. He was finding out that one's deepest convictions could in a twinkling be dissolved, that striving and hope could go for nothing, leaving one aghast before one's helplessness. He had loved Ruth deeply. None of the distractions of the *Quartier* had seriously tempted him. The thought of her had been his star, his religion, for three care-free, confident years, during which he had been much to her. Her eyes had often unconsciously caressed him, and he had believed that she cared for him more than she knew.

Without this hope and belief now, the effort of living weighed on him. As the *fiacre* carried him over the river he pondered on what might happen within a few months. If



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Ruth's words and looks meant that she was going to marry Brundage, he would have to hide his desolation from his friends. The effort seemed beyond his powers of dissimulation. It would be better for him to go back to America before that happened. Paris, with its maddening, glowing memories at every turn, would be unendurable without Ruth. Yes, he would go home. And after? Well, he would live down his disappointment. He would not go through life a mourner nor a hermit. He would harden his heart, and eventually he would "get over it." But though his mind spread out this philosophy, he only felt the ache of loss.

As he sat back, his arms crossed, he decided to begin the "getting over" part of it that night. Andy was giving one of his parties. Tom usually escaped from them, as they did not amuse him, but to-night he would go and lose himself there, defy his heart in such a scene to hunger for Ruth, his fancy to dream of her. To damage his own ideals might be



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

a vigorous way of beginning the business of forgetting.

He gave the *cocher* a *pour-boire* so large that individual decided that though Americans *en route* could be maddening, their finish was generally satisfactory; and ignoring the dreamy, automatic *ascenseur*, went up the curving, stone stairways to the top. He usually covered the steps in bounds. To-night he walked in a measured way, his head lowered. All the way up he was conscious of Ruth. As he passed the *atelier* door, behind which he heard singing, laughter, the banging of the piano, and voices talking in a roistering mixture, she walked with him. In his own room, as he rebrushed his hair savagely, his white face and stormy eyes flashing back at him from the glass, she was there, too—she, the lost but adored. He went out on the balcony through the open windows into the spring night, the perfume and the silence, but he could not stay there, for there most of all was Ruth, so close to him she seemed leaning



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

upon his heart. He had dreamed of her so often upon that balcony, sometimes in the sparkling mornings before breakfast, when he knew that in a few hours he would see her at the studio, but more frequently at night when the gardens below were massed shadows, and the distant boulevard lights made a silver haze on the sky.

A sharp rage against himself stung him like a tonic. This was not "getting over it"; this was not forgetting. He shoved his hands into his pockets, set his mouth, and strode along the balcony to the open *atelier* window. He stood outside, unseen, and looked in. Andy's parties, innocent enough in a way, were often eccentric to the point of insanity. To-night he was at his wildest. It was a costume supper. The costumes were all improvised, as were the decorations and the manners of the guests. Near the big, square table, made of planks, stood Tom's life-size reproduction in plaster of the Venus de Milo; she was crowned by a red wig and a Paris student's tall, straight-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

brimmed hat at a rakish angle, and with these she wore a scarlet necktie and a man's dress-coat. Billy Marss was a dancer in spangled skirts. Andy was Nero in a sheet, with a crown of carrots and a necklace of red peppers. Cyril Bright was in full football regalia, with a nose mask on. The five girls were all models well known in the *Quartier*, all bizarre and beautiful as living posters, except little Angèle, who was marvelous in the rags of a beggar-boy. Her shock of fair hair protruded through a crownless hat, her knees showed through hanging patches, her bare babyish feet, the most beautiful drawn or modeled in Paris, were at the moment flashing in a fantastic dance to which Nero beat a furious tattoo on a toy drum.

When Tom stepped in without warning, the dance and drum-beats ceased, and a howl shook the walls. The eight fell upon him.

"*Regardez* Respectability!" Andy yelled, and it was a clarion-call to the rest.

"*À bas* the Puritan!"



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

They tore his dress-coat from him and rumpled his hair. In a whirl of mad gaiety he was forcibly arrayed according to the inspirations of the moment: they made an apron of a leopard-skin rug, tore a scarlet velvet coat of the thirteenth century from the wall, putting it on him with the back to the front, and from a mass of head-gear of various countries and periods a Chinese mandarin's hat, like a big cane mushroom, was selected. Made one of the elect in these, his forehead and chin were painted sky-blue, he was sprinkled with Chablis, and christened "An Inhabitant of an Undiscovered Country."

Tom started in to be a reveler with the determination of a diligent schoolboy to memorize the multiplication table. No one laughed more, sang with more spirit, or danced more wildly than he. It was well known among his friends that he had been an object of special interest to little Angèle. He had dismissed the jokes and teasing about her with an indifferent shrug, and she had never seen him save



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

as a big, quiet, clear-eyed young man who posed her, drew her feet, and then with kindness, but an unassailable remoteness, watched her walk off on those same entrancing little feet.

To-night Angèle told him he was "human," as he tossed her high in the dance to the beat of "*Viens Poupoule*," or sat beside her on the big, cushioned window-seat and whispered that she was "*si douce tout-à-fait*," and that no other, surely, save the Blessed Damozel, had feet like hers, and various other flattering and inaccurate things.

But all the while his mind was crystal-clear and marvelously analytical, and all the while his heart was the home of a great pity. Something within him was esthetically disturbed; he would have been contemptuous if he had not been made sad. As it was, while he played his part with some degree of success, he had strange thoughts. Angèle was lovely, but when she coughed, which she did often and rackingly, he shivered. Nor could he enjoy



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

the charm of her little, infantile face, because he saw the wan cheeks beneath the paint, and knew that fever and kohl made her eyes so bright.

Dare-devil merriment sped the night on, but he, while a seeming part of it, pondered on earth's weariness. He knew so well the secret cares and heartaches of these poor girls. They were not hard, evil, or bad-intentioned. They were kind-hearted, generous, and simple, following their affections lawlessly without understanding, introspection, or remorse, the result of unique conditions in an unique environment, for all the world like little squirrels frisking and nibbling without fear of the morrow.

But beyond the laughter, feasting, and light-hearted *diablerie*, Tom thought of the to-morrow waiting for little Angèle. Her future was a dogging shadow that only he saw that night. She was ill, she was poor; she was living in a way to hasten death; she would in a year or so be too ill to pose; she would be



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

cared for miserably by her poor comrades; she would die. Strange thoughts at a time like this, while she laid her burning fingers on his, and said, through the smoke of her cigarette:

“Ah, how I am happy to-night!”

At three o'clock the party came to an hilarious finish. Tom wrapped Angèle in a monk's robe and took her, and Sylvie who lived with her, home in a *fiacre*. At their door Sylvie went up first, and Angèle lingered over her good-by to Tom. She expected him to kiss her, but the grip of his hands upon her shoulders was an epitome of an immature fatherhood.

“Do you know what I'm going to do, Angèle?”

“Eh, what—big boy?” she murmured, touching her lips wistfully to his fingers.

“I'm going to send you into the country. Yes, you're going to Mère Vivier's, and drink all the warm milk you want right from the cow, and roll in the grass—with Betou.”

She started, and looked up at Tom with a wild unbelief.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“What do you mean?”

“I’d heard you’d sent Betou there, and that you were slaving like a dog to pay for him. That’s why your cough’s so bad; you’ve been half-starving yourself.”

Betou was Angèle’s two-year-old son, valued as she valued her eyesight. She only saw him once a month now, for Mère Vivier’s was twenty-eight miles from Paris, and many francs were consumed in the going.

“You’re to pack up to-morrow,” Tom went on, “and when you get to the farmhouse you’re to rest, and play with your baby, and lie in the sun, and do all sorts of foolish, country things. You won’t have to think of money, you understand, Angèle. I’m attending to all that. You’re just to write me how you’re getting on, and how much it costs.”

By this time Angèle was sobbing against him. She was overcome by the realization of how tired she was, and how very sweet it would be to lie in the sun on the grass with Betou, and kiss and kiss his pouting, rosy mouth until



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

she was weary of its very sweetness. She pressed Tom's hand to her heart in pitiful joy.

"How wonderful! Oh, *mon Dieu!* how good! How I adore you—you are so good, so sweet, big boy! I love you next to Betou—and you love me, too, your poor Angèle?"

Tom held her off with a shy, brusque laugh.

"We're not talking of love, Angèle. You're just a baby, like Betou, and I'm your physician."

"But you'll come and see me sometimes," she purred.

"Never," he said lightly and with a smile; but she knew he meant it. "Now go to bed, rest to-morrow, and get ready."

He picked her up as if she were a child and carried her up four flights of old, trembling stairs to the door of her room, and she sobbed in a spent way, with her lips against his hand.

So Tom's night of revelry ended. He pondered on its futility as he walked back in the dawn. His love for Ruth had formed an inner citadel in his nature, and he had fancied he



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

could so easily overthrow it. The light loves of the *Quartier*, which he viewed as leniently as his comrades, and which were an accepted phase of the life, did not attract him. He was neither judge nor critic, but the love of one woman consumed him, and that woman was Ruth.

The gardens, which he skirted on the way back to his apartment, lay dream-like and pure in the pallid light; the damp, sweet air was cool, like a nun's kiss; the birches beyond the palings were straight, silver lines in the dusk; Paris was sleeping; it was the hour of innocence; and as he walked, only his footsteps breaking the silence, he "invited his soul." The night had matured him. His turbulent despair was dead. Renunciation had written its message in his gray face and calm eyes. His nature seemed reborn, and peace had come to him out of the travail.

Among his letters at breakfast there was one that seemed like a hand beckoning to him to make a seam between his present life and a



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

new one, and which was curiously in keeping with his mood, so charged with a sense of finality.

“ I got off at Queenstown,” it commenced, “ and I’m over here in Dublin, you infernal idiot! I want you to come here and do Ireland with me in a jaunting-car, and listen to the horse-sense I’m prepared to reel off to you. I’m going to make you a business proposition about giving up that beggarly artist idea of great aims and ideals and all that muck, and coming back to New York to be a sane citizen and my junior partner. Think it over; and, anyway, come and let’s have a look at you. If you leave me here alone, I swear one of these blue-eyed colleens will marry me against my will. I’m at the Shelburne, and your room is ready. LESLIE.”

“ I’m going to Dublin,” he said to Andy, and added a shock to that surprise; “ I shouldn’t wonder if you’d have to look up



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

another berth pretty soon, old man. I may leave for New York shortly after I come back—may go into business with my cousin.”

“This is—so sudden,” said Andy, with a wan smile and a mind-picture of the attic he saw himself *en route* for. “What the devil makes you think of such horrors—New York and *business*?”

“If I told you all, sonny,” said Tom, “you’d know as much as I do.”



## CHAPTER XX

AFTER *café au lait* the next morning, Ruth went to her mother's room. Mrs. Dakon was sitting up among the pillows. Her face had been hastily "arranged"; her hair, which had been brushed by her maid for an hour, hung in a crisp, shining cloud around her shoulders. Ruth could see that her coffee had grown cold, and she was making a pretense of eating a buttered roll.

"Noddy, you look ill still," she said, and put her arm around her mother's shoulders. "Is it more than a headache? A night's sleep usually sets you up."

"Yes, it's more than a headache." The words were cold, brusque, and she pettishly pushed Ruth's arm away. "It's a heartache as well."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Has something happened that I don’t know about?” Ruth asked, in gentle concern.

“No. You know more about it than anybody else,” her mother flashed, and turned around fully in the bed, her face as repelling as an evil mask.

Ruth shrank at the look. It was a revelation before which her heart trembled. That her mother’s eyes could hold that look for her! The meaning of it? Her mind groped for the truth vainly. She did not think of Lawrence, for it seemed to her that a knowledge of her secret engagement could only bring a maternal chiding, a passing reproach for her silence; but this expression which chilled her blood was open enmity, jealousy, hate.

“Noddy—Noddy, I don’t know what you mean.”

“Don’t you? Oh, you can lie, can’t you? Yes, with your innocent face you can lie, and play a deep game and hold your tongue. When I think of all the years you’ve fooled me!”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Ruth looked at her narrowly, convinced for the moment that her mother was giving the first evidence of sudden insanity; but the explanation came almost as the fear was born.

“This!” cried Mrs. Dakon, drawing a letter from beneath her pillow. “This! Yes, it’s a letter to you, and I opened it. It came last night when you were out, and I opened it. Your anger is nothing to me. I had a right to open it, a right to know if my daughter were carrying on an intrigue with a man like Lawrence Brundage. Well, I soon found out. He’s your lover, yet not a word said to me. Of course, you were ashamed or afraid. Or probably *you* were ashamed and *he* was afraid. Take the letter. It’s not the first of the sort he’s written. It won’t be the last, either, though I’ll wager the next won’t be to you.”

She had sprung from the bed. The torrent of words, her wild eyes, her trembling hands, frightened Ruth so that her anger at this infringement of her rights was submerged.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

This, her first love-letter, desecrated, wounded her as if she had seen a helpless little child belonging to her brutally maimed. Without opening it, and with its torn edges against her palm, she looked steadily at her mother.

“ You had no right to open my letter—not the slightest. But I’ll pass over that. What have you discovered? That I’m engaged to marry Lawrence Brundage. He came yesterday to tell you, but you were not here. He’s coming to-day. When he asked me to say nothing about our engagement until he had seen you, I consented. I longed to tell you, but I kept my promise to him. Was that any crime? You look and act as if I were guilty of something unspeakable.”

Mrs. Dakon sank into a chair and closed her eyes. Ruth flew to her, fell on her knees, and wrapped her in her arms with fierce affection.

“ Darling, don’t look so. Oh, don’t! It breaks my heart, and I can’t see why you should. I thought you might have some objection to Lawrence because he is so much



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

older than I am, but not a serious one, for, oh, Noddy—*mother, mother!*—I love him so.”

Mrs. Dakon looked up and her rage was gone. There was a dead calm under the heavy lids, a fixity of purpose at the corners of the usually indeterminate mouth.

“And he is your choice. My God!”

“What has he done?” Ruth cried, drawing back and speaking in anguish. “Oh, you look at me strangely. If he has done something to make you shudder like this, surely he wouldn’t have been here as your friend. You seemed to like him. Tell me what you’re thinking of? What has he done?”

“He’s coming here to-day, you say?” she said, as if Ruth had not spoken.

“Yes, at four o’clock.”

“Well, I’ll see him.”

“Noddy,” Ruth seized her hands passionately and faltered, her face very white, “this means so much to me. I—I—love him so! It almost frightens me. But if he has really done something—if he’s not fit—if— Oh, tell



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

me! I know he hasn't led a good life. He has confessed that his misdeeds, his sins, have been many; but I told him I would not think of the past at all. He's different now. I know he loves me. Oh, there's no doubt of that! What is it—what is it that makes you look so? Won't you tell me what you're thinking of? I've a right to know."

"You shall know. Make no mistake about that," said her mother, with a laugh that was ugly. "No doubt he'll try to muzzle me. But I promise you, you'll hear it all after I've seen him. Then you can make your choice." She pushed the girl from her in a spasm of rage. "And doubtless you'll decide to forgive him this, as well as the rest. We'll see."

In her own room Ruth sat down, her elbow on her knee. She was startled and as white as her linen gown. There was a cloud stealing across her sun. She heard the sound of a coming storm. Would it pass without mortal hurt to her, or would it be a hurricane leaving disaster in its wake?



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Her mother's words might mean one thing which had suddenly become possible to her understanding—jealousy—because she was herself in love with Lawrence. The thought grieved Ruth, but she was helpless before the inevitable. But her mother's look was different. There was more than covetousness and petulance in that. She had not believed such an expression possible to the pretty, doll-like features. It was terrible, as if lightnings had leaped into the eyes of the Mask of Tragedy.

Lawrence's letter, forgotten, was still clutched in her hand. She opened it, feeling that its words, gazed at by other eyes, had lost their bloom.

“MY DARLING LITTLE LOVE: I always think of you as ‘little,’ although you're not, really. I could wish you were smaller, so that your ear would rest just where you'd hear the heart that is beating so hard for you. What have you done to me, dear witch?



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

You've given me new eyes, for the world I look on is all beauty. You were so sweet to me to-day, I had to write you this.

"I've been dining with some men, and they found me stupid. No wonder. While they were talking of everything under the sun, my brain was thinking just one word: 'Ruth—Ruth—Ruth.' I had to get by myself and send you these few lines. Darling, how dearly I love you, and how happy we're going to be! I'm like a twilight after a day of storm, and you are a beautiful, sunny morning; still I'll make you love me more each day. Oh, Ruth, when I think of being in Japan and Egypt with you, of seeing your eyes look for the first time at the things that have grown meaningless to me, but which will become radiant again with you beside me, I feel as if life were just beginning.

"Dear, you're the sweetest of girls, the sauciest of rogues. You teased me horribly to-day, but I loved you dreadfully. Good night, my darling Ruth. Your kisses haunt



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

me, and make me so happy and so miserable—happy because you have kissed me, miserable because you are not with me now.

“LAWRENCE.”

She read it unsmilingly, with troubled heart-beats. A doubt, whose face was as yet unfamiliar to her, robbed the words of sincerity. If the look in her mother's eyes meant truth? With tenacious, passionate love, she held her idol to her, her heart all flame and hunger—and yet, *her mother's eyes?*

She went to the studio, posting a note to Lawrence on the way:

“Noddy knows about us. She seems distracted by it. I've never seen anything more awful than her face, as she talked of it. She will see you this afternoon at four o'clock. I won't be in till late, so you can have a good, long talk with her and perhaps conquer her objection, whatever it is. I don't understand what could possibly affect her this way. I feel frightened and all at sea—but I love you.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Mrs. Dakon had not moved from the couch where she had flung herself after Ruth's departure until it was past two. With her arms flung over her head and her narrowed eyes fixed on one spot on the wall, she was living over her life in thought.

She saw it in a series of scenes: The years on a Southern plantation till she was seventeen; her marriage to Anthony; the crashing of her brilliant prospects; Ruth's birth; the life at Bate's Crossing; her visit to New York and meeting with Lawrence; memories of that time of rapture which even in her present jealous pain quickened and warmed her heart; the last night at The Lawns; his beseeching, passionate, compelling letters afterward; that day in the wood; Anthony's suicide; her remorse and slowly reviving hope after it, when she waited for Lawrence; the tortured days when she waited in vain; his letter casting her off; her almost fatal illness after it; her recovery and her acceptance of his money; lastly, her life in Paris as Ruth grew from childhood,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

one year much like another, until she saw his face again; the rebirth of her love for him; her hopes and her belief that her brightest dream was at last to be realized; the appalling knowledge that he loved and had won her child.

A tempest of self-pity swept over her. She burst into hard sobs, beating her hands against her bosom. The futility of revenge! She could, she thought, prevent Ruth's marrying him, but he was lost to her. That fact was the bitterest drop of this most bitter drink. Revenge was a poor thing, but it was all that was left to her.

She rang for her maid and ordered a good breakfast. Her physical weakness craved the food and wine, though its flavor was lost to her, and by degrees she felt her blood grow warm, and the solid earth under her feet again, instead of shifting sands.

At three o'clock she began her preparations for Lawrence. She wanted to look her best. It would be a victory of a sort to make him



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

realize that she whom he passed by was, nevertheless, a beautiful woman. Her *masseuse* had arrived. The woman covered a table with bottles and bowls of water, and then began the secret rite of making up Mrs. Dakon's face.

First the tears were sponged away with orange-flower water that had a little benzoin in it. When this was dry, the face and neck were rolled with a rubber contrivance until the blood danced under the fine skin. Then came the application of creams, oils, perfumes, each in turn from numbered bottles. These were magically rubbed in by the woman's velvet, practised, perfumed finger-tips. At this point Mrs. Dakon's face looked like freshly ironed flesh with the fire on it. Small pieces of ice were then pressed to the muscles, and now Mrs. Dakon looked like one in the first redness of freezing. When this glow disappeared, her face was ready for its Parisian complexion.

A white paste was rubbed into the pores and most of it left on; it had the appearance of



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

melted cream which softly hardened by contact with the air. A fine powder was put on over it with a piece of medicated cotton, and this was applied deftly, delicately, until the effect was fine, white skin without any particles of powder showing. Lashes and brows were cleaned with an infinitesimal brush and a dark brown cosmetic touched to them. The lips were ruddied with cerise, the nostrils and lobes of the ears colored the faintest pink.

The *masseuse* departed, and Mrs. Dakon remained with her head thrown back, her eyes closed, while her maid came and tossed up some of the bright hair into little billows on her head, using a hot iron to wave a section of it all around the front and back, and finished by drawing this up to join the coquettish topknot. Her little head was now a complete mass of glittering ripples. The work was done.

She sat up and looked at herself, with earnest eyes demanding the truth of her glass, and the blackest despair she had ever known poured into her veins. She was all white and



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

gold and pink, but she looked old. She looked fifty instead of forty. Lotions and powders were futile while her cheeks had hollows in them picked out by the wrath of a hungry heart; while her eyes were dull like pebbles, and the hideous, downward semicircles of bitterness at each side of her mouth were there, not to be wiped out by human touch.

She sat for a long pause, staring at herself, her freshly darkened lashes wet. She looked elderly, made-up. In the white lace tea-gown spread on the bed, she would look a fool. A moan crushed its way through her lips. A week's suffering had worked this change in her. It was another item in the scale of her revenge against Lawrence. She hated him in that disillusioned moment more intensely than she had ever loved him. Her face was dark as she rang for Étienne and ordered him to draw the silk shades in the *salon*.

Lawrence came upon the stroke of four and was shown in. The sun was completely shut out by the rose silk except for a tempered



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

haze. The place was as silent as a church. The half-light and stillness stifled him. He felt his heart pounding against his side. He looked for Étienne, but as he was gone he went over, impetuously opened a window, and let in a flood of air and sunlight that revived him like a drink of cold water. Into this glare Mrs. Dakon stepped a moment later, blinking like a cat. She gave him a look of hate, and flung the window back.

“My head is aching,” she said shortly.

“I beg your pardon,” said Lawrence. “It seemed close here. Can’t I get you something?”

“No, thank you. Sit down. I sha’n’t detain you long.” She arranged herself in a chair with her back to the window, fingering the lace on her gown nervously. “I know why you’ve come to-day.”

For the first time in their acquaintance she saw fear in his look, saw his fingers tremble.

“Before you say anything, let me plead my case,” he began. “Nora——”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“There is no case to plead,” she said in angry contempt. “There are just these facts: You want to marry my daughter. You can’t.”

“Your objections——”

“You know what they are. We won’t go into them. Just let me ask you this: Did you tell Ruth your story and mine? No, you didn’t. I knew that this morning. You won her by fraud. You’ll never have her.”

“You can’t mean that. You can’t mean, Nora,” he said, going to her and taking a chair beside her, “that you’re going to count up the old score against me. You don’t know how I’ve regretted that. I was wrong, I admit—selfish—cruel, if you like. But I did make amends, didn’t I? Can you say that I haven’t brought any happiness to you? Can you say that these years of—of—competence here, in surroundings that are suitable, in a city you love, have not wiped out a little of the old mistake——”

“Mistake!” she sneered furiously.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“The old wrong, then. I don’t want to mince words and spare myself.”

“Yes, I took your money. Fling that fact in my face, if you like. I had to take it. I have to still. I’ve always been ashamed of it.”

“Well, admitting all the past,” he said, meeting her gaze, “can’t you find it in your heart to forgive it? I’m doing you no further harm in loving Ruth.”

He paused. He did not know that these words, showing a peaceful unconsciousness of all she had hoped for, made the heaviest note in his knell.

“After these years,” he continued, “in the present, when you and I are friends, this new feeling has come to awaken me, to make me better. You wouldn’t rob me of Ruth’s love. She need never know. Parting us can’t mend the past. What’s done is done.”

“You’ll never marry her,” she said, and set her lips.

His distress broke all bounds, and he sprang up.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“If you try to part us, you’ll be doing the cruelest thing a woman ever did.”

“Think what you like,” she said, with the invincible obstinacy of small natures.

“Your daughter loves me. Ruth loves me. Can you smile and strike at her in order to make me suffer? Think of her. She loves deeply. There is soul-stuff in her. She loves in a way you can’t understand. Life and death are in the feeling—and she loves *me*.”

“Oh, no,” she said, with an insulting little laugh, “she loves what she *thinks* is you! Otherwise, why didn’t you tell her about the old days? Why?”

He paced before her, his lips gray.

“I don’t like opening healed sores. I don’t like dragging out the family skeleton and rattling its bones. I know how I love Ruth. I know that loving her has changed me utterly from the man you knew. I know I can make her happy.”

“I’m not so sure even of that. You’re more



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

than twice her age," she said in a cold, fluted voice.

"She loves me!" he said, his face illumined.

"We'll measure that love," and Mrs. Dakon, shaking out her laces, stood up. The tragedy was all in his face now; she was smiling. "I'll not hamper Ruth. She'll make her own choice. I promise you I'll not denounce you nor give any coloring to the picture. She shall know the bare facts, and decide then if she wishes to marry you. You may win, but I think not."

He leaned his hands on the table, moisture on his temples.

"I wish to God I'd told her myself! When I got a note from her this morning, saying you were against me, I went to the studio. I meant then to tell her. But she'd gone, alone, into the country; they didn't know where. I spent the day looking for her along the Seine, but couldn't find her. Then I came here, to find you like this. I didn't dream you were capable of such hate. The miserable story is



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

so old, so old, you might let it rest in its grave-clothes.” His mind leaped to one hope. “If you tell Ruth all the truth, you’ll have to admit accepting an income from me. Or will you leave that out?”

“It won’t be necessary to mention that.”

“You’re playing a petty game, but I’ll stoop to your methods.” His eyes were burning and determined. “Unless you tell all, and tell this last fact as part of my justification, I’ll tell Ruth about it myself. If you let her think I left you without some redress, I’ll prove you a liar. Now take your choice. Silence—or all.”

She smiled easily and waved her hand.

“You think I’d hesitate? Not for a moment. I’ll tell her all. She’ll blame me for having done it, no doubt. But I’ll chance it. And now, will you please go? My head is really much worse for this scene.”

He took up his hat. His face was older, his forehead creased with pain. At the door he looked at her.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Will nothing make you pity me?”

“Nothing can keep me silent. Ruth must know.”

“When will you tell her?”

“As soon as she comes in.”

When he reached his hotel he found a telegram from London awaiting him, and for a time this diverted his thoughts from the crucial issue of his life. It was that his nephew, a young collegian of twenty, had gotten into serious financial trouble. Besides, he was ill with pneumonia, alone in his chambers. Lawrence was very fond of the boy, his sister's child. Had the difficulty been only a matter of money, he could have straightened it at once, perhaps, by telegrams, but the message sent by the lad's valet about his illness was urgent. He felt he must go at once, though an absence from Paris now was ominous.

If he could see Ruth before Mrs. Dakon did— But Fate was against him here. He did not know where to turn to find her; she might even now have reached home. There



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

was nothing to gain by staying, *once she knew*. In fact, an interval after the shock before their meeting might make her calmer and therefore kinder to him. Besides, he might be able to return in a day or two, and in the mean time he could write to Ruth, and win a sign of hope from her to take with him. While his man packed his things, he wrote and sent the following:

“MY DARLING: By the time you get this your mother will have told you the old story of dishonor. I admit everything, dearest, but this I say to you—to you who have given me a new earth that is like heaven—I’m not now as I was then, and I love you. You won’t cast me off for this. No, you won’t do that. Condemn the Lawrence Brundage of twelve years ago, but oh, my love, my Ruth, believe in this one. I am like one insane, and in this tortured state I must go to London to help Philip Pembroke, my nephew, who is perhaps fatally ill. Give me one sign, sweetheart, that you forgive



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

me and love me still. I'll leave Paris by Dieppe and go by the night boat. I can't even try to see you, but give me a sign. I will be opposite your house, Ruth, at seven o'clock. Come out on the balcony and let me see you, if I have still any place in your heart. I'll watch for you with a longing that is agony. Pity me. I love you. Without you I am a lost soul."

A little before seven his carriage drew up in the Avenue Montaigne opposite Mrs. Dakon's. He stepped out and walked slowly down the street, keeping his eyes fixed on the balcony of the apartment *au deuxième*. Lights were shining in the *salon* through the rose silk, and one window was open. It was on this window his longing gaze was fastened. Through this Ruth would come.

He was white and nervous as twenty times he went up and down the street, but no sign of life fluttered the flowers on the balcony, no face looked down at him. The fever lessened



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

in his blood; his heart-beats became slow and heavy; the open window through which no one passed gradually became as the face of an enemy. At twenty minutes past seven he was forced to retreat to his carriage and be driven away to the train. Still he would not believe.

“She has not reached home,” he said. “She hasn’t yet had my letter. When she reads it she’ll send for me. There’ll be a letter at my hotel when I get back. I’ll leave London the day after to-morrow. She hasn’t read my letter. When she reads, she will write. She will send for me. I know she will. She won’t give me up.”

At several stations he sent her telegrams, appealing, loving. His one cry was not to give him up—to hear what he had to say—to believe that he loved her. From midnight to dawn he paced up and down the narrow deck of the Channel steamer, a haunted wretch.

No one appeared on Mrs. Dakon’s balcony all that night. In her own room Ruth sat alone, the door locked. She had heard her



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

mother's story. As seven o'clock struck, she was sitting by a table, her face on her locked hands. The love-letters Lawrence had written to her mother twelve years earlier were spread out in a tossed heap before her.



## CHAPTER XXI

AT midnight, for the fifth time, Mrs. Dakon crept down the hall and listened at her daughter's door. Still the light through the keyhole, and not a sound. She was ready for bed, an elaborate silken *négligé* tumbling over her night-dress; but it would be useless to try to sleep without some further speech with Ruth. The memory of her face as she listened to the long, hysterical story of that past which had been shrived and buried for so long, was not a pleasant one. The disclosures had been unrolled with digressions, self-excuses, and wildly bitter accusations against Lawrence, her statement to him that she would be impartial notwithstanding.

She wished that Ruth had cried out, or protested, or disbelieved, or launched bitter words



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

at Lawrence, even at herself. Anything would have been more endurable than her awful calm. She had seemed to freeze in the chair. Her closed hand upon the table had been like a dead hand. Mrs. Dakon had often heard the simile of faces seeming to change to stone, but had never seen this look upon a living face until to-night. Ruth's hair had seemed like a wig over a petrified face. When her mother had untied the old love-letters and poured them with vehemence into her lap, Ruth had gathered them up slowly, and, without a word, had gone to her room, locking herself in.

Thoughts that made Mrs. Dakon tremble raced through her mind now. Ruth might have killed herself. She had always been a puzzle to her, had always felt things so keenly. During her school-days she had studied nervously, passionately, to pass her examinations, not sleeping or eating. At fourteen the death of a school friend she had loved had been such a violent grief to her that for months she had



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

not smiled, and had grown quite thin. In her elementary way, Mrs. Dakon divined that her child had tragic depths within her. It was quite within the bounds of possibility that Ruth lay dead beyond the door, locked against herself. She knocked cautiously, more loudly, then frantically.

“Ruth! For God’s sake, come out and speak to me!”

Relief rushed through her as she heard a chair pushed back. The door was opened and Ruth faced her. She was in every detail just as she had been when she entered the room. She had not shed a tear, but she had an elderly, wasted look, and her eyes were as hollow as if she had been watching beside the adored dead.

“You want to speak to me?” she said in a numbed voice.

“Oh, Ruth, how awful you look, darling!” her mother screamed, with a rush of tears, and tried to put her arm around her. “You cared horribly. But I had to tell you. You don’t



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

blame me? If you'd found it out after you'd married him——”

“Don't say anything more about that now,” she said in a tone that could not be disobeyed. “I think if there's nothing else, you'd better go to bed. You'll get cold.”

“You've had no dinner,” her mother wept as she dabbed her nose with a wet handkerchief. “I had Étienne spread a nice little supper for you. There's a *pâté* and some claret.”

“I'm not hungry. Good night. You'd better go to bed.”

“Won't you please eat a bite just to please me? And, oh, *do* come into my room and sleep on the couch. I can't bear to be alone. I'm so nervous, I'm nearly crazy. Oh, if you have a little pity, don't shut yourself in again and leave me alone! I sha'n't sleep a wink. Please—please, Ruth,” she whimpered, and pulled at her arms like a frantic child.

Ruth put her away gently, saying, “I'll go with you.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

She took up the scented bag holding her nightgown and turned out the gas. Her composure was uncanny to Mrs. Dakon. In the dining-room she poured out a goblet of the claret and drank it eagerly, but to further pleas to eat she shook her head. For the first time since her childhood her mother would have spread the satin coverlet over her and tucked her in; but something in Ruth protested savagely. She shrank from the attentions. It was as if her mother, having stabbed her, was trying to heal the wound with kisses.

“Please go to bed, mother,” she said. “I can take care of myself.”

Mrs. Dakon's tears flowed again. She stared at Ruth, unconscious that the brown cosmetic from her lashes was dabbled on her wet cheeks.

“You call me ‘mother.’ You don't say ‘Noddy.’ I believe you hate me.” Ruth lay down and closed her eyes. “Do you? Do you hate me?” she persisted.

“No, I don't hate you. Please try to sleep.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

I'll talk to you to-morrow. I want to think now."

"Think? I'd say, try to forget. What's there to think about?"

"I'll talk to you to-morrow," she said, and turned away.

The night was old before Ruth fell asleep, and the morning was very young when she awoke. Memory played a cruel trick upon her. For a moment the truth was wiped out. Her heart was heavy, but she had to grope for the reason of it. It came quickly, and it was a whip that lashed her up to action.

She was leaving the room without making a sound, but a long, sleepy sigh from her mother's bed stayed her. As quietly, she returned and pushed back the silk curtain. Mrs. Dakon slept heavily, her hands falling open, her brow unruffled. Ruth in spirit was apart from her, looking at her with the eyes of a stranger. She was a helpless figure to tempt the arrows of destiny, a woman born to make mistakes and be forgiven for them; her bur-



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

dens, as a matter of course, to be placed on the shoulders most convenient, she to eat the fruit unsparingly and to be thanked for the rind she left for others. It had always been so. Ruth's face was unsoftened as she dropped the curtain and went out.

The servants were *au sixième*, and would not be down for an hour. She set the kettle boiling. After a cold spray and a cup of strong coffee, she dressed, and very soon stood in the new, June morning under the chestnut-trees. The streets were gray and full of floating mist, just the upper points of dormer windows catching a golden light. She was alone except for occasional workmen in blue blouses and *bérets*. When she reached the Rond Point and looked up the Champs Élysées, she felt she had Paris to herself.

Sparrows chattered among the lines of empty chairs, and on the rise above the silent avenue she saw the great Arc, awesome in the mist as if it were the portal to an unearthly land. She drew a chair to a point against



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

a tree from which her eyes could rest on this Arc. She had always loved it. She knew its every mood, and its beauty had brought content to her soul. Even now, when she was tasting the bitter waters of such a grim awakening as she had never dreamed of, its majesty and peace comforted her.

She sat so still the sparrows ceased to fear her and darted about her inquiringly. A small brown object lay in her lap and her hand caressed it, her eyes sought it often. It was an old tobacco-pouch that had been her father's, some of the tobacco that his fingers had touched still in it. Her heart was clamoring for him. She prayed silently, as she sat back with closed eyes, that if his spirit could reach her it would come to her, make a sign to her. Her desire was so intense her body trembled; she spoke his name aloud; she begged him pitifully, as if she were a little child again, to come to her there, to let her know in some way that he was with her.

A leaf fluttered down and fell upon the lit-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

the pouch, worn shiny from use. Upon the stillness and her dreaming its descent was like a shock. She picked it up. This might be the sign. It was young and green, and there was no breeze blowing, yet it had fallen at her prayer. This might be the sign. She pressed it to her lips, while the first tears rolled slowly from her closed eyes. For another hour she sat there until Paris had awakened to the business of life. She shut the green leaf behind the clasp of the pouch and went slowly home.

Étienne passed her in the hall with her mother's early coffee and rolls.

"Madame has been asking for you, Mademoiselle," he said.

"Say I'll be with her in a few moments," Ruth answered, and went to her own room.

She gathered up the tossed letters and made them into a package. Her face wore a determined expression. The man that had written those letters to the wife of his friend was not the man she had loved. In groping, bewildered, astray, to a condition of mind where she



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

could accept this, she had known the sting of anguish and then a gaunt desolation. This morning she was thinking of her father's share of pain. Two had wronged him, and he had paid the price. Cold justice had slipped like a rod of iron into Ruth's nature. Lawrence Brundage should pay now to the full. Her mother should pay, as much as her nature was capable of.

Mrs. Dakon was sitting on a couch, slipping on a pair of satin *mules* when Ruth came in.

"Oh!" she cried, in a tone of tragic relief, "I was just going to you. I haven't been able to touch my coffee. I haven't slept a wink all night. Where have you been? Étienne said you'd made coffee before he got down."

"I went for an early walk. Here are your letters."

Mrs. Dakon's face was abashed as she took them.

"When I put them in the bottom of my trunk—as women will do such foolish things,



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

you know—I little thought I was saving them for you,” she said grimly. “I’ll burn them to-day.”

Without replying, Ruth sat down at a little distance, facing her.

“There’s something we must speak of. Do you feel like it? Or would you rather wait?”

Her tone was courteous, impersonal, her worn face calm. Mrs. Dakon gave her a frightened glance.

“Why do you speak to me that way?”

“What way?”

“As if I were a stranger, or a thousand miles away from you, or something. I don’t like it.”

“We’re not going to have a scene, mother,” Ruth said gently. “We’re going to talk over this situation sensibly, quietly, and do what has to be done, quickly.”

“I wish you wouldn’t ‘mother’ me,” Mrs. Dakon said testily, balancing the satin *mule* on her toe and frowning. “And I don’t in the least know what you’re driving at.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Don’t you?” Ruth drew a paper and pencil toward her and began figuring on it in silence for a moment. “Fifteen thousand dollars—twelve years.”

Mrs. Dakon’s eyes grew round.

“You owe Lawrence Brundage to-day one hundred and eighty thousand dollars.” She looked at her mother fully. “This in all probability you never can pay back. About how much of it was spent on me? Can you estimate at all?”

Mrs. Dakon leaped up, her face flaming.

“What do you mean by talking this way to me? Are you trying to insult me?”

“Not unless the fact that you’ve lived on Lawrence Brundage’s money for twelve years is an insult.”

Mrs. Dakon flung up her arms, sank into a chair, and burst into loud sobs.

“Oh, to think that my own child should say this to me—that she should dare to say it! Oh, my God! What shall I do?”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Ruth leaned over her and put her hand on her shoulder.

“You are wrong, mother—Noddy—quite, quite wrong. You spoke of insult. I hadn’t the thought in my mind. We must talk over this. It’s unpleasant, but it can’t be helped. The amount you’ve spent is beyond your giving back, but my share I must some day——”

Mrs. Dakon pushed her hand away furiously.

“I never heard more Quixotic nonsense—such utter trash as you’re talking this moment. Give back? Return? Why do you make a fuss over this? I took the income; I had to; I’d have gone stark mad if I’d lived in New York with your good, virtuous Aunt Abby, who was the most disagreeable old viper under the mask of Christianity that was ever created. Haven’t I done what was right by you? Educated you here in Paris, given you beautiful clothes, paid out money for your painting lessons to big men——”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Don’t—don’t!” Ruth shrank away, her eyes darkening with wrath, her body quivering. “Can’t you see that’s what maddens me? Can’t you see that’s why I spoke? I am what I am to-day because of this man’s money. The thought makes me desperate, and will until I’ve wiped out my share of this debt at least.”

But Mrs. Dakon was outraged. She stamped her foot as her exasperated glance traveled over her daughter’s figure.

“You have no sympathy with me.”

Ruth was silent.

“Have you?” her mother screamed. “You stand there like a ghost and look at me with hard, cold eyes, although you’ve read those letters and know all I went through. Answer me. Do you pity me at all?”

“Yes, in a way, I pity you.”

“In a way?”

“You were made to suffer through your own acts. I forgive you all. I know, too, how fully Lawrence Brundage’s brutality



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

avenged my father. But you may as well know that not you or Lawrence Brundage or my own awakening has wrung my heart. My father's story has done that." The tears were glittering now in her hollow eyes. "If I seem hard to you, remember the thought that's with me is this: You stood ready to nail his bleeding heart before the public eye, and when he knew this his life was finished."

The passionate words were uttered in a breath. Mrs. Dakon quailed as she heard them. There was a look on her face as if a ghost had risen. But her instinct of defense had become pugnacious, and she rallied.

"You have the heart of an oyster to talk this way to me, your mother. How dare you?"

Ruth paid no attention to the vixenish fury of the words.

"We're not going to quarrel. I wanted you to know that some day I'm going to cancel my debt to Lawrence Brundage," she said, going to the door. "I was going to talk to



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

you, too, about just where and how we're to live in future. But perhaps that had better wait."

Mrs. Dakon wrinkled her brows angrily.

"You seem bent on maddening and confusing me this morning. What's this next idea of yours? Where and how we're to live, you say?" Her voice grew strident as she sat down and flung her head up. "We are to live here, and as we have always done."

"But how can you? You can't afford this place any longer. You'll have to live quite differently. Don't you realize that we'll be poor?" asked Ruth, her fingers falling from the knob. She went to her mother and leaned over her chair. "Noddy, it will be hard at first, but in a way it will be sweet. To stand alone—to be independent—what is better?" she said, with sudden tenderness. "If I seem cold to-day, forgive me. I feel as if I'd been down into a grave since last night. But I mean to keep close to you, and we'll fight the battle together. Of course I'll leave Dubosc's



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

at once, and, except for my new canvas, I'll stop painting and do illustrating for papers and magazines. Léon Lemaire and his brother have gone into the publishing business and will put a lot of that in my way. It won't be long, I think, before I'm making about five thousand francs a year. I've thought over everything. You remember Mrs. St. Leger is looking for an apartment for her American friends. She'll take this off your hands. Sell her the furnishings too—you have some beautiful tapestries, paintings, silver—and you'll have this much to give back. Probably she'd take the carriages——”

With a sound as if she were strangling, Mrs. Dakon sprang up and faced her daughter. She was ghastly.

“All of this stuff means that you suppose I'm not to have seventy-five thousand francs a year any more—that you think I'm not to take it any more,” she said, her teeth shaking, her eyes a challenge. “You think I'm to be a pauper.”



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Ruth stepped back from her. Her mother rushed on:

“ You have the most absurd notions. That’s because you’re young and raw and know nothing of the world. You think it’s easy for a woman like me to renounce luxury, and go out into the world to scrimp and work and get fagged and old?” She gave a jarring, excited laugh. “ I’m not quite a fool. Give up my beautiful home, my friends, my gowns, my servants, my *masseuse*, my horses—all for a silly schoolgirl’s romantic idea of what’s right?” She snapped her fingers angrily. “ Never! It may be very nice to live in a draughty old barn of a studio up an alleyway on the other side of the river, and buy your two *sous*’ worth of cheese, and cook over an oil-stove, when you’re twenty-one, but not when you’re my age. I stay where I am. I consider this money my just due, and it was given to me for life. What have you to say to that?”

The last question, defiant though it was,



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

fluttered on her lips. She grew cold before the look in her daughter's eyes. She could not quite fathom all it meant, but she never forgot it.

“What are you?” Ruth said at last. “Are you my mother? How can you be, and choose to be contemptible all your life and thrive on it?” she asked, quick passion sweeping through her; “a creature that was jilted, and then—*paid*—grow sleek and happy as the years go on, on such money? Are you my mother?”

Mrs. Dakon sank into a chair, motionless and fascinated before Ruth, who seemed to tower above her.

“Not if you do this, not after to-night.” Ruth went on, the tone a seal upon the words: “Make your choice now—this income that degrades you if you will, but say good-by to me. I would not only not touch a *sou* of it myself, but the sight of you would offend me. I'd never want to see you. I mean this.”

Mrs. Dakon's eyes flooded again; her voice rose to a wail:



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Remember what I’ve suffered——”

“I’m thinking of this money.”

“Oh, you can be cruel!” She sprang up wildly. “But I’ll not be poor! No, I won’t! You don’t know all it means at my age. I can’t. No, and I won’t. There!”

Ruth opened the door, but her mother dragged her back.

“Where are you going?”

“Out of this house now, forever—out where I can breathe,” she said frantically.

“But I’m your mother, and I can’t let you go.”

“I’m going now.”

Mrs. Dakon grew hysterical.

“Well, even if you don’t live with me, you’ll let me see you. You’ll not be angry——”

“Mother, would you want to see me when you knew that the sight of you *sickened* me?” asked Ruth, seizing her by the shoulders. “For it would. Oh, it would!”

“Oh, God help me!” Mrs. Dakon moaned, her knees giving way. She looked up at



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Ruth's white face, while holding fast to her. "I'm your mother—I can't give you up. I'll—I'll give up the money. Do what you like with me."

She fainted. Ruth put pitiful arms about her and lifted her to the bed.



## CHAPTER XXII

IN four days they were ready to leave the Avenue Montaigne. The apartment had been rented, the furniture sold to the new tenants. Ruth closed her eyes to the fact that some things of value had mysteriously disappeared. The tapestries, rare and costly, were gone from the hall; there was a gap on the wall where one of Henner's nudes had hung; an antique silver lamp and tea-set were not in their accustomed places. Ruth knew her mother had stored them away somewhere and omitted them from the inventory, but she remained silent. Mrs. Dakon had reached the highest point of self-sacrifice possible to her. Ruth had no wish to take her morally by the throat and force her to a sane, clean pride she neither understood nor wanted.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

It was six o'clock when Ruth reached home after a fatiguing day. She had removed her belongings from the school to a cheap *atelier* up an *impasse* on the Rue Monsieur. Attached to this there were three living-rooms holding the furniture of the last owner, who had gone with a year's rent unpaid. Ruth had put her easel with her half-finished canvas on it, had bought an oil-stove, a chafing-dish, a better bed for her mother than the one the missing artist had used, and a divan for herself.

As she had supervised the cleaning and arranging of the place, she had tasted the first piquant savor of freedom. This home was to be hers, to be paid for by the work of her hands. The rooms, simple though they were, and in sharp contrast to the luxury they were leaving, were capable of comfort and beauty. She had put a jade bowl filled with yellow roses on the mantel; a massive brass jar from Bruges, picked up on the Rue des Quatre Vents for a trifle, had been transformed into



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

the base for a big shaded lamp; new curtains of white cheese-cloth hung in straight, full folds across the big north window; sketches and unframed canvases peopled the high walls with color and a semblance of life; books were on the tables, on the low window-sill, and on a shelf which, at the height of a man's head, was built around the big room.

She was waiting now for her mother, whom she had not seen all day. Without taking off her hat, she was so tired, she sat back in a big chair, thinking. Everything had been attended to. A package was waiting for Lawrence at his banker's. It held the pearls and the ruby engagement ring in the old jewel box, together with a letter from Mrs. Dakon refusing further money, returning the last check from his lawyers, and enclosing her check for the amount received by the sale of her effects. Letters from him, still with the London postmark on them, had been sent to his hotel unopened. Ruth wanted to wipe the memory of him from her life. She wanted



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

to know nothing of his future. The thought of him made a flame of anger and disgust wrap her. She would not give the new address to any one he could possibly see. No one at the studio, nor the *concierge* here, nor Mrs. St. Leger, should know it until she was sure he had left Paris. The *impasse* in the Rue Monsieur was far from the Hôtel Ritz and would be a trusty hiding-place.

“How queer you look,” were Mrs. Dakon’s first words as she entered, “sitting there with your hat on! Really, you must take yourself in hand. You’re losing what looks you had. Your face has grown horribly thin.”

The sprightly tone in which she launched the criticism made Ruth alert. Since the change in her fortunes, Mrs. Dakon had been a languid, morose martyr, but now there was a briskness about her that told she was on better terms with herself and the world. Her eyes sparkled belligerently, two disks of color burned on her cheeks. She had on her most beautiful afternoon-gown, too, a soft silky



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

stuff, the color of a tea-rose; a hat all of tea-roses was tilted over her eyes; a white-dotted veil just escaped her beautiful little nose; and she was violets from her bosom to her belt line.

"I look ill, I know; but I feel more content," Ruth smiled, "than when I looked better."

"Really?" said Mrs. Dakon politely, as she pulled off a long, pale glove, twinkled her fingers to ease them, and looked at her rings.

"The place is all ready, Noddy," Ruth went on. "It's very pretty and satisfying with its big, shining north window and some flowers about. I hope you'll like it. Of course you'll have to cultivate a different point of view, and not make comparisons with this."

"What place is it?" asked Mrs. Dakon, with insolent unconcern as she put the violets in water.

The tone angered Ruth.

"Our new home in the Rue Monsieur, of course. Where else? You know I've been working at it for two days."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“And you thought I’d live there?”

“You saw it, and you said you would.”

“My dear, I’d hang myself at a rope’s end first,” she said suavely, as she carefully removed her hat and stabbed the big coral hat-pins into it.

Ruth’s face darkened with anxiety.

“Evidently you’ve made other plans. What are you going to do?”

“You thought I was going out to rough it on the Rue Monsieur?” She flung back her head and laughed heartily. “My dear, just fancy! Give up my comforts, my woman to rub me, my Sylvie to cook for me, my carriages, even Coquet? Oh, Ruth, how merciless a young girl can be!” She stood up and smilingly ruffled the hair above her forehead before the mirror. “No, my dear, I stay here just as I am—but with an addition to the household.” She went gaily to the outer door, saying: “You may come in. Here, my dear,” she cried, returning, “is your new father. We were married an hour ago. Mrs. St.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Leger's friends take his apartment and furniture instead of mine, and he comes down here."

Professor Gunning stood in the doorway, exquisitely arrayed, a white flower in his buttonhole, his arms extended, a cajoling smile on his face.

"Come here to me, me dear," he cooed, "and kiss your new dada—the happiest man in the French capital this day."

Ruth's amazement died quickly. She had not thought of this solution of her mother's difficulties, but it was logical enough. She went to the professor and he kissed her on both cheeks. Tears rose to his eyes as he held Ruth with one arm, and encircled his new bride with the other.

"It's two darlings I have instead of one. Bedad, it's a happy family we'll be. *Nous verrons!* And now, if you'll both be ready by half past seven, we'll have a dinner under the trees at Armenonville to celebrate that'll warm the cockles of your hearts."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Mrs. Dakon wore all scarlet to dine in.

"He likes me in red," she said, with a shyness and gentleness that surprised Ruth.

"Noddy," she said, "do try to make the professor happy. He's such a love."

"Oh, I will," Mrs. Dakon asserted confidently. "And don't misjudge me. You may think it's only because he's rich. But there's another reason. I'll always be a goddess to him. He'll never be my critic. When I do get wrinkles, Ruth, he'll never see them. You see," she sighed, "I had to think of everything."



## CHAPTER XXIII

LAWRENCE was shown into Mrs. St. Leger's parlor in the Hôtel Ritz. She was lying on a sofa eating *marrons glacés*.

"Excuse my not rushing to meet you. I've had to give up the impulsive style." She looked away from his fatigued, gloomy face and rambled on: "I'm getting so fat, Larry, I intend to let my stays out, put up my feet, and cultivate a languid air. Isn't it distressing that everything I like goes to upholstery? I've been thinking it over," she said confidentially, "and I believe it's all explained by the reincarnation theory. You're not listening."

He passed his hand over his eyes in a nervous way.

"Indeed I am. I'm particularly anxious to hear how reincarnation and fat affiliate."



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Well, I think that in my last existence I was one of those lovely, skinny women,” she said, making a pillow of her arms, “who can eat anything and never lose a line, hang wads of stuff on themselves, shirrings, tucks, and even have the stripes go around them and remain ‘willowy’—how I hate that word! I believe I was one of those when I was here before. But I dare say I had a nasty disposition and went through life making it hot for some one; or I may have been a downright bad lot, robbed a bank, or murdered a cruel guardian. So when I was born this last time, the angel that presides on those occasions, and has a nasty job of it, I think, probably cried out in angel language: ‘Theodosia’—that’s my baptismal name, you know—‘thou shalt be unable to wear the fluffy, fussy clothes thou shalt most admire. Thou shalt like all those things thou shouldst not like; thou shalt yearn to thy undoing for the floury potato; thou shalt dally with the sauces of the Gauls; yea, thou shalt love the champagne when it fizzeth



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

and the cocktail when it fizzeth not, and these things shall be as thine enemies. Go thy way, Theodosia, and on that way I condemn thee for thy past sins to much flesh and a waddle.' Now I ask you if I'm not 'up against it'?"

She looked tragic. Lawrence gave a slight laugh.

"You're too absurd." He turned to her fully. "If you've quite finished, I want to ask you a few questions. I'll have to explain why——"

"You don't have to ask a single question or explain anything, Larry." Mrs. St. Leger sat up with a business-like air and adjusted her hairpins. "Don't you suppose I know why you look like a dead man with his eyes open?"

"I've just come from London; saw Phil Pembroke over the crisis of pneumonia."

"Ah, really!" she said, with mocking sympathy. "Your anxiety as an uncle has done you up this way. Admirable creature! You could pose for the Ten Commandments turned out by a London tailor."



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“What do you know?” he asked brusquely.

“I’ll tell you. Bo-peep came here and told me all that I didn’t know or divine about that old love-affair. If ever there was an angelic martyr whose crown is kept constantly polished and waiting, she is that martyr. If ever there was a rake, *roué*, wretch of the blackest dye, warranted not to streak and perfectly weather-proof, that unmentionable creature is you. If ever there was a little lamb, pursued by the *roué* and protected from him by the martyr at great personal risk, that woolly little darling is her daughter Ruth.”

He stood up, his glassy eyes very bright in contrast to his exhausted face.

“I want to see Ruth,” he said, with bitter yearning. “That’s all. Only let me see her. Manage it for me, Pussy, and I’ll be your debtor as long as I live. Ask her here. I must speak to her. She won’t even read my letters. Her mother is keeping her from me. If I could see her it would be different. Get her here and let me see her. Will you?”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"I don't know where she is."

"She hasn't left Paris?" he asked, aghast.

"I don't know. You evidently haven't heard the most astonishing bit of news. Mrs. Dakon has been married since you left. She's now Mrs. Gunning. Perhaps you've seen that good-looking old Irishman who lived in the same house? That's the man—rich—dotes on her. She's in luck——"

"But Ruth—Ruth——"

"I'm coming to her. She's gone out into the world to earn her own living somewhere, and her address is a secret."

"Can't you get it? Can't you manage some way—some way——"

"Not by fair means, and I'm not sorry enough for you to get it by foul."

He paced before her nervously.

"I see. Your sympathies are with Mrs. Dakon—Gunning—whatever it is," he flashed.

"She has a lot on her side. Now listen to me. I'm not a stern moralist, and I make as many allowances for human weakness as I do



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

for London fogs—part of the outfit. But, Larry, when you think that had you acted decently to Bo-peep you would have been Ruth Dakon's grave and reverend papa for these long years, why in the world did you elect to fall in love with this girl, in this world of girls?" and she flung her arms wide.

"I didn't 'elect' at all," he said, and sat down, his face hopeless. "I loved her, that's all. And I do and I will."

"Oh, this is a place where the moralists might well chuckle," said Mrs. St. Leger, taking another *marron*. "Had you never made love to Bo-peep, you could now marry Ruth. But because you did, you can't. That you love her, as you never loved before in your life, is part of your punishment. Larry, Time is having his joke with you. He's always represented as a very gloomy old person with a beard of unfashionable length and leaning on a scythe. But I believe he's a comedian, and I can fairly see him with his hands on his sides laughing at you."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“Your imagination is particularly vivid this morning,” he said coldly, his brows meeting as he took up his hat. “I didn’t get the information I came for, but I’m obliged for the moral lesson.”

Mrs. St. Leger followed him to the door and laid her hand on his arm.

“Larry, you’ll be foolish if you try to find Ruth Dakon. It’ll do you no good. I feel it.”

“I’ll find her,” he said, his look dogged, “and when I do—when I do”—he murmured, his voice thrilling—“she’ll love me and she’ll marry me—and the past be damned!”



## CHAPTER XXIV

RUTH had gone to live her own life in the Rue Monsieur. Many tears had been shed by Mrs. Dakon, wordy battles fought, and the fatherly overtures of Professor Gunning resisted, before this was accomplished.

“What will people think?” Mrs. Dakon had demanded. “They’ll say you detest your stepfather.”

Ruth protested amiably.

“Dear Noddy, they’ll say nothing of the sort. It’s the most natural thing in the world that I should leave you with him, in this home, charming for two and impossible for three. Besides, two things make my choice of an independent life quite reasonable: I am an artist and an American girl. The *Quartier* is full of others just like me, and they are my friends.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

Besides, Babe will pitch her tent with me when the summer's over. I'll be with you a great deal, dine with you, go about with you. But I long to taste freedom." Her face grew grave as she added: "Besides, to speak once more of a subject we decided to bury, Noddy, I've had a blow, you know. Work is the best medicine for me. I ache to begin it."

She had her way. This, to Mrs. Dakon's mind, meant having everything hateful and unlovely. The left bank of the Seine, except in the Faubourg St. Germain, was impossible. The neighborhood Ruth had made her home in was pungent with many odors. She saw nothing interesting in the *impasse* with the low, red brick *ateliers* on each side. The big north window was a horror to her, for the light through it was merciless. She had inspected Ruth's kitchen behind a big screen, and the thought of her daughter boiling eggs and making coffee on the smelly little stove made her unhappy. To see Ruth in a brown linen blouse with paint-marks on the sleeve, her



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

throat bared for comfort, was like seeing a stranger. She drove home from the inspection dissatisfied, and said to herself:

“She’s not a bit like me. She’s her father all over. How much she looks like him since her face has grown thin! Her eyes to-day were so like his when he used to come home tired out from that awful factory. Poor Tony!”

Ruth worked hard. She had been in her new quarters more than a week, and, though she had risen early to get the light on her canvas and stayed at it till dusk, only eating a roll with a leaf of lettuce in it for her *déjeuner*, the work was not progressing. She was feverishly anxious to finish the painting and sell it, thereby earning her first money. Then she would be free to seek orders for illustrations, and her real existence as a breadwinner begin. Her very eagerness acted as a weight that delayed her. Her work of one day was obliterated the next.

On a humid morning she was sitting before



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

the canvas. Her palette was smeared with dabs of fresh paint, but her brush was idle. There was one effect she could not get. The picture was a bit of still life, showing the kitchen of a Normandy farmhouse. There was to be firelight on the uneven hearth, and the sunlight of very early morning was to creep in a cold, radiant band over the rough threshold. The effect of these mixed lights was to make the whole meaning of the painting. She had done successful work on the yellow flare from the burning branches which brought out the homely minutiae of the smoke-stained walls, the dried herbs on the rafters, and cobwebs over the chimney-piece, but the sunlight kept cheating her. She could not make it real. It was hard, without limpidity. It did not bring to mind the dew still undried on the fields outside, the lark singing, the still sleepy peasant making ready for his work.

She wiped out what she had done on the sunlight for the fifth time, and with complete



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

languor sat back. Inspiration had deserted her. Perhaps she had better wait. After all, a working mood was as impossible to summon at will as happiness. One could not force truth from a brain that seemed as dry as a sucked orange. She sat this way, staring from the canvas to the permeating mist which had begun to sift through the heated air. Her temples throbbed. For the moment independence in the Rue Monsieur seemed a sorry possession.

She then faced frankly a deep-laid, subtle need which had matured within her heart in an unobtrusive way, as the little green things push themselves into gentle bud under the snow. She wanted to see Tom. She missed him sorely. The room seemed aching for the warmth of his big, blithe presence. With a shadowy remorse and wistfulness she thought of his love for her; how he had bared his heart, unashamed, with a pagan candor and simplicity, for her to smile at. She had undervalued him because he had been the accepted,



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

usual thing in her life—so usual, too, the days of work together in the country; the dinners in dreamy gardens by the river, their canvases beside them; the crystalline talks about art, while in the pauses, passionate love, glorious and natural as the summer day, made silent appeal from Tom's eyes. Those days seemed far away now. He was not even in Paris, and if he were, it was likely she would not have roused herself out of this spiritual anesthesia to send for him.

Ten minutes later she was walking rapidly in the soft rain without destination. She wore a mackintosh and sailor hat and carried no umbrella. The mist stung her lifted face and made her cheeks faintly pink. She was thinking of her picture, and her mind saw the flare of cold, early sunlight as she longed to have it. Several times she was on the point of turning back and trying again, but the walking, which made her glow, kept her magnetically on her way. She had no idea where she was till a church-bell began what seemed a lisping



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

knell, and she was amazed to find herself standing in the Place de Parvis de Notre Dame. When she crossed to the church and passed under the arched doorway her heart was very bitter. The last time she stood there Lawrence Brundage had been with her. He had watched her praying for her father; he had seen her tears for him.

The vast place was almost empty. About a dozen people were at the distant altar, and she caught the glimmer of a baby's white coffin. In the heaviest shadow near the door she sat down and closed her eyes; even her fingers relaxed. After resting so for a little while, she looked up. A few stragglers were pacing up the aisle toward her, and, though he was still far off, she recognized Lawrence among them. He was walking slowly, his head bent. She had opportunity to leave without his seeing her, but something chained her there, and kept her gaze with compelling attraction upon him. Their eyes met. The gravity of his face was swept away by a sav-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

age joy. She stood up, leaning upon a chair as he hurried to her.

"Ruth!" he said softly, but with intense prayer and longing.

"Well?"

"Oh, Ruth, how I've tried to find you!" He laid his hand on hers and tried to force her fingers into his clasp. "Every day I've come here hoping to meet you. I'd have searched for you till death. Did you think I could give you up without a struggle?"

"No," she said impassively. "That's why I hid from you."

"Your mother parted us. Everything has been sent back, even my letters unopened. Oh, Ruth, was this fair? But I felt if I could once stand face to face with you it would be different. I had a right to see you."

"What right?"

"The right that love gives."

Her hand had crept from beneath his.

"You and I can have nothing to say to each other. Everything is changed."



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“Everything but two facts, Ruth: That I love you and you love me, and, thank God, they make a tie you can’t break. You love me, Ruth. You have suffered, too, and I see it in your face.”

Her heart lightened. She felt gloriously free. She had been so afraid to test herself. Women had obstinately, miserably continued to love men they could not respect, afflicted by passion as if it were a disease. She might have been like that. But she knew now that this man was not he whose power she had first felt when they stood in this place before, and nothing could give him back that lost, radiant personality. Philosophy and resignation had followed the irremediable through the same door.

“Let’s go where we can talk,” he went on with passionate determination. “Drive with me to Foyot’s, and over breakfast we can——”

“No.”

“Then where?”

She shook her head wearily.



## *'TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

“ You don’t understand, then, at all? ” and she sighed as one might who has an impersonal but unpleasant duty to perform. “ This place will do quite well for all we have to say. ” She moved back a little farther, and they had the quiet corner to themselves.

“ Your silence has been maddening, ” he burst out. “ It has been worse than if you had flayed me with words. In London I was like one damned. ”

“ I thought silence the only decent thing. ”

“ You’ve been so cruel, ” he went on, ignoring the words. “ Even on that last day, after my letter to you, you wouldn’t give me a sign of mercy. ”

“ You mean by coming out on the balcony? ” Ruth smiled. “ I had to be excused. You see, I was very engrossed just then in reading the love-letters you wrote to my mother twelve years ago. ”

She saw him quiver as if touched by a lash.

“ She showed you those! ” he muttered.

“ I’ve now a very thorough acquaintance



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

with your methods. You have a good grip on strong English. You can write a love-letter that any woman might believe. I must compliment you."

For the first time he doubted his ultimate power to win her back. Her face was serene and slightly insolent, her eyes had the cold shine of stars. It was hard to believe that this stranger was the girl that had kissed him in the fragrance and darkness of the countess's garden. He was like a worshiper tearing his heart open to stone.

"You, who have said you loved me, can mock me?" he stammered.

She gave a slight laugh.

"I told you everything was changed. Certain interesting facts about you have altered all that. I don't love you in the least."

"Oh, indeed!" he said, his face whitening. "Yet I never pretended to virtues beyond me. You knew I regretted some things in my past life. You said you could forgive my sins."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Ruth settled herself more comfortably in the corner, her foot on a kneeling-stool. Her glance became scorching.

“Sins—yes, I said so—not crimes.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“You will.” Her next words came slowly, a reverence in them which had nothing to do with him. “You killed my father. Oh, I know you didn’t use a cudgel or fire a shot, but you killed him.”

The passage of the child’s funeral up the middle aisle checked his reply. She watched the weeping procession after the little coffin, tears gathering in her eyes. When the church was quiet again, except for the sad-tongued bell, she said, as if speaking to herself:

“I’ve often dreamed of his dead face. That awesome look! I know now it was the amazement of his broken heart through his closed eyes, that his friend could have stolen the one precious thing in his poor life. I’m sure that look was on Christ’s face when Peter denied him.”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

Those were her thoughts of him. Her look turned him cold and dumb.

“If you felt any sorrow at his death it was only the fluttering of your nerves. You forgot—you gaily forgot. Why, from the very beginning, what were you? You had written those letters to my mother, meaning to have her ruin her life for you, burn her bridges behind her publicly, and, if a divorce had followed, you meant to discard her.”

“As God hears——”

“Leave God out of this, please,” she sneered. “It was not your avowed, clear intention, because men of your sort never look into their souls. But the idea of marrying her was never in your thoughts. Your discarding her could only have been a matter of time. This was to depend on just how soon she began to bore you. At the best, you’d have made her a soiled, superfluous toy. So you were a scoundrel from the very first.”

“You shall not call me that!” he muttered, falling back from her.



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

“But you were, you know,” Ruth smiled in intolerable scorn. “If after my father’s death you had done the only clean and merciful thing, it wouldn’t be in my power to say this to you now. But marriage to my mother was not in your prospectus—*not even then!* As she expected this from you, she became a nuisance. You jilted her brutally, but you made the odious act easy for yourself by giving her money, which she was spiritless enough in her desperation to take.” Her voice trembled here. “I’d rather have been flogged every day of my life than have used a *sou* of it if I had known. But I’ll pay back what was spent on my support. Remember, I’ll make that the purpose of my life.”

“Have you finished?” he asked in cold wrath.

“Not yet. And you dared to try to marry *me!*” she said, her eyes flaming. “If I could forgive all the rest, the thought of that would make me loathe you. Now will you please go?”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

He who knew women so well saw the hopelessness of attempting to make her subtract a word from her sentence. She was not the woman who loved him, or who had loved him. She was his judge. Dismissal and finality were in her full gaze.

“Good-by, then,” he said, and turned away, but stopped to look at her again with bitter triumph. “Right or wrong, I’m glad you loved me. That first kiss in the countess’s garden,” he said in a slow, vibrating whisper, “will be my sweetest memory.”

“And my regret,” she answered, with an accent of intolerable humiliation.

She did not look up until the sound of his unwilling steps upon the marble had ceased.

In a little while Ruth was back in the studio. She looked at her pale face in the mirror as she took off her hat, and smiled defiantly. She ought to look happy, she ought to feel happy. She had rung down the curtain on Lawrence Brundage and need hide from him no more. That the daughter of Anthony Da-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

kon had told him the cold truth about himself perhaps for the first time in his life, was the perfection of justice. This ought to make her glad. She sat down and clasped her cold hands together, staring at the wall, but looking into her heart. Everything she had said had been true; she would say it all again to him; she despised him. In all probability she would never see him again. Her freedom was complete. Forgetfulness of it all would come by degrees. Her life with its beautiful absorbing work stretched before her. She ought to be very glad.

But Ruth was learning what it meant to be a woman. Love lay dead within her consciousness, but the body had not yet been put out of sight. Her heart ached with a new loneliness. The silent studio with the increasing rain pattering like a fall of steel beads on the panes seemed the home of a silent, despairing presence. Ruth felt it brood over her. She drooped under it, her eyes growing empty of light, lassitude weighing upon her. The



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

late afternoon found her in the same mood. Painting was out of the question. She tried to read, but the book slipped from her slack fingers. She tried to write, but found herself sitting with her head on her hand, while the pen trailed meaningless curves, dots, and angles over the paper. The thought of the night that would soon shut her in in a more complete silence became suddenly unbearable, and she was roused to a desire to dress and go to her mother's for dinner. But even after she decided to do this she still drooped in a deep chair, cold, sluggish, weighed down by an unresisted melancholy. Strength to obey her will seemed to have dripped from her inert fingers, and so the night passed.



## CHAPTER XXV

ALMOST a fortnight later, at two o'clock on a very wet day, Tom came home. He swung into the *atelier* in a very businesslike way, followed by the *concierge* bearing his trunk with many labels.

"So you're back, and Irish weather with you," said Andy, half turning from the easel where he was smoking and mixing some paints. "Not a word from you since you left," he exclaimed indignantly. "You're a nice pal!"

"You didn't want letters of travel, and there was nothing else to talk about," said Tom, proceeding to make himself comfortable with his pipe. "But maybe you did. I'll begin: I liked Dublin. It's as dirty as London and as dull, but the people are bully; blue eyes everywhere; long eyelashes



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

at every turn; awfully pretty girls; a light-hearted, shiftless nation; nothing better than the cricket at Trinity to be seen anywhere; love jaunting-cars; hate Irish cooking, much sense and no seasoning; Irishwomen ride like the devil; good figures; rains a good deal; much tweed on Sackville Street; beautiful park, Phoenix——”

“ Say, look here, this isn’t a Cook’s tour,” Andy began plaintively.

“ Next, Killarney,” Tom went on; “ wonderful ruin, Muckross Abbey; Gap of Dunloe on horseback; peasant women, shawls over head; violet eyes, wretchedly poor, laugh a lot——”

“ Oh, shut up!” yelled Andy, and kicked his chair over in getting up. “ Let *me* talk,” he said, as Tom folded his arms and looked at him in a purposely vacant way. “ Things have been happening here,” he announced with a heavy importance, and lifted himself backward on his palms to a seat on a table, where he swung his legs and looked at Tom with



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

relish. "Yes, son, things have been happening."

"To you?"

Andy made a large gesture of over-emphasized humility.

"What am *I*?"

There was a heavy pause, and Andy saw the breathless expression, the widening of eye that he wanted, pass over Tom's face as he grew very pale and folded his arms tighter.

"It's about Ruth, isn't it?"

Andy nodded.

"What?"

He asked the last word as a matter of form. He thought he could almost utter the exact phrases in which Andy was to tell him of Ruth's sudden and romantic marriage to Lawrence Brundage. During the past weeks, as he had rowed dreamily over the silver lakes of Ireland, and been driven in a lilting car through the land where waterfalls whispered and a mist like incense trembled over the green fields, he had hardened himself to hearing, on



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

his return to Paris, news of Ruth's coming marriage. He could have received it with more courage and philosophy than when he had gone away, so much he had conquered himself. But to face the fact that the Ruth he knew was absolutely gone, and the wife of another man lived in her stead, had shaken him.

"There's been a smash-up in the Avenue Montaigne," said Andy, sucking on his pipe jovially.

"A quarrel?" Tom asked, conscious of relief as the tightness around his heart snapped.

"No one knows anything about anything. That's the devil of it! At first Ruth told Babe the apartment was to be rented, that her mother had lost all her money—staggerer number one. Then Mrs. Dakon married old Gunning offhand, and they kept the apartment—staggerer number two. All this time Ruth looked awful, as if she had consumption—just like Delphine Tacot," and Andy sucked his round cheeks in to illustrate disease. "She



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

left the studio without saying good-by, took her picture away one Saturday, and—there you are.”

“Where is she?” shot from Tom’s lips.

“Where?” shrugged Andy. “That’s just it. Nobody knows—staggerer number three.”

Andy enjoyed to the full the blank gaze leveled at him, as the pipe, its embers gray, hung from Tom’s lips.

“Doesn’t Babe know?”

“Nopey. Ruth sent her a note saying she’d give her address soon, but for the present she didn’t want to see any one.” Andy drew himself up. “I didn’t think it of Ruth, but I believe it’s beastly pride—snobbish, I call it. What if she has to get down to real work, and live in some hole over here? It’s no more than lots of us have to do; as I’ve done and will have to do again when this peach of an arrangement here with you is over, if you really go back to New York. Too proud to let her stepfather support her—*that’s* all right,” Andy went on, lost in his own eloquence; “but



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

why the dickens she should go and bury herself as if she were hiding from some one—  
*Where are you off to?* ”

He blurted out the question in amazement. Tom had stood up, had knocked the ashes from his pipe, and was putting on his coat and hat.

“Where are you going?”

“Out,” said Tom absently, taking up his umbrella.

“Glad you told me,” snorted Andy. “Why, do you know I thought you were getting ready for bed.”

Tom had reached the door. “Don’t wait dinner for me,” he said, and the sound of his running feet on the stone stairs followed.

“Gabriel after his Evangeline,” Andy thought as he went to the window and watched Tom cross to the gardens, and then he reflected with much satisfaction that he was glad no girl living could get him out on a wild-goose chase on such a day.

It was indeed wildly wet, a hurricane almost, most unseemly weather for summer. Tom



## TIME, THE COMEDIAN

astonished Mrs. Dakon by appearing an hour later in the Avenue Montaigne. After some hasty congratulations on her marriage, to which she scarcely listened, they talked for twenty minutes, or rather Tom pleaded and she shrugged, and in conclusion she gave him Ruth's address.

"Don't ask me to explain anything," she said helplessly, holding out the smallest of slippers with the largest of buckles to the wood blaze sputtering on the hearth. "Most of all, don't ask me to explain Ruth. She's beyond me. Why that girl should choose to live in such a place— Well, it's just this—she's her father, root and branch. Not a bit like me," said Mrs. Dakon proudly; "not a bit. I can't help loving her, of course, but," and she smiled with a sweet pity for Ruth, "we are absolutely unlike."

After four o'clock, and while the beat of the rain was still a monotone Ruth heard some one come up the ladder-like stairway, in the *impasse*, which led to her door. When she an-



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

swered the knock, she saw Tom against the background of driving torrents and wet, drab houses, a cascade pouring from his umbrella. The life quickened through her numb body. The dark day, the storm that had filled her quiet place with mournful and mysterious creaking and sighings, had brought her loneliness to a desolate apex. She wanted to tell him that she had been aching to see him. She could have flung her arms around him. But she gave no hint of this, other than a bright smile and the trembling of her lashes, which always showed when she was pleased.

“I wouldn’t have tried to find you,” Tom said with a youthful, ponderous formality while placing his wet umbrella carefully on the hearth, “if I hadn’t been going away. I’d have waited a little longer until you wanted people to come.” His eyes were more like a grieved dog’s than ever, though he tried to speak in a matter-of-fact way; “I simply forced your mother to give me your address.



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

As long as it was to say good-by I felt you wouldn't think me cheeky. So I came."

"You're going away?" Ruth sat down opposite him. She was not smiling now. "To America, I suppose?"

Tom choked down something. Now that he saw her—the dear, green eyes, the dimple wavering in her cheek, the little clasped hands—it was hard to be there as a brother might have been with good-by hovering near.

"To America," he said. "But I didn't come to say only that. I'll put off going if I can help you. I don't know what's happened that you're here like this, and perhaps you'd rather not tell me. But one thing I do want to know: Can't I do anything for you, Ruth? You see," said Tom earnestly, setting his teeth and smiling, "you mustn't think I'm going to butt in with a lot of rhetoric about my disappointment. That's all done with. But I'm ready to protect you. Isn't there some business matter I can attend to, Ruth?"

"No, Tom."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

"Any one's head you want punched?"

"No, indeed," she said, with a sighing little laugh.

"I feel so strong. I'm just crazy to help you," said Tom wistfully. "There must be lots of things a fellow like me could do for a girl like you."

Ruth shook her head slowly. He saw a little sigh tremble through her.

"Nothing," she said; and added: "So you are going to America." She moved a book on the table and did not look at him. "You're not coming back—ever?"

"I may, sometime, as a visitor," he said, with a flagrant counterfeit of a cheerful smile. "But I'm leaving the studio. In fact, I'm not going to be an artist."

"Why should you, unless your talent makes any other life impossible?"

"Do you think I have talent—the real thing—Ruth?" he asked, with an accent of curiosity.

"Great talent," she said earnestly. "More



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

than that, I don't believe you can help being a painter. You were born for it."

His eyes grew warm at the words.

"I feel that way sometimes. But—I had to leave here—and anyway I thought I'd try something else. My cousin Leslie wants me to buy a seat on the Stock Exchange in New York. It's an exciting life and that's what I want."

Ruth's eyebrows twitched. "You'll never be a money-maker, Tom," she said with conviction; "never. When you should be buying or selling stocks you'll be watching the frenzied faces of the others and thinking how well this or that one would paint."

"Well," he said desperately, "I'll have a shy at it, anyway. I can't stay here."

"Are you homesick, then?"

"You know why I'm going," he said flatly, without looking at her. "Don't be afraid. I'm not going to make a nuisance of myself. I came to see if I could help you in any way, and then to say good-by, that's all." He



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

turned his stricken eyes to hers and repeated vigorously: "That's all, Ruth."

She did not answer, but still thoughtfully moved the book on the table.

"I'll go now," Tom said abruptly.

Her eyes followed him as he went to the mantel for his umbrella. With his rumpled, fair hair, troubled eyes, the rain-drops glittering on his huge shoulders, he reminded her of a big, trusty retriever driven into the wet.

"I hope you'll be very happy," she murmured.

"Thank you." He stood before her helplessly: "I sha'n't see you again."

"When do you go?" she asked in a very small voice.

"Three days. From Cherbourg," were the words; and the tone was: "Good-by, darling, darling. You can't love me, but my heart is breaking for you, and I'm so near telling you all about it again and making an awful ass of myself I'd better get out of this in a hurry."



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

He took her hand and crushed it. She stood up and looked at him.

“Good-by,” said Tom, his voice zigzag.

Ruth's other hand flew to his shoulder, crept from that to his collar, and then to his cheek, where the blood began to tingle while his heart-beats became like hammer-strokes. The little hand crept on until it lay against his lips.

“Don't go,” she said in a pleading whisper, and pressed her face to his wet, fuzzy sleeve.

The umbrella fell, and his arms were around her in wild longing.

“But—Brundage——”

“Don't ask me about it. Some time you shall know.” She clung to him and sobbed without restraint. He heard her stifled words only faintly. “Tom, you see the picture over there. I can't get the sunlight in it. It won't come in for me. I've tried day after day; it won't come in. It's like my life, Tom. There's no sunlight in it now. Help me to find it.”

“But can I, Ruth?”



## *TIME, THE COMEDIAN*

She placed both her hands tenderly on his face, and looked into his eyes, into his soul, a look that was terrible in its longing and demand.

“Yes, you can. You are young, you are honest, and your heart is clean.”

Their fresh, childish mouths met, and tears of agonizing joy stood in Tom's brown eyes.

“I don't love you now,” Ruth murmured, “quite as you want me to, dear. I'm so sore, Tom. But, oh, how I'm going to love you by and by!”

(1)

THE END







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## WORKS OF ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

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# IOLE

Colored inlay on the cover, decorative borders, head-pieces, thumb-nail sketches, and tail-pieces. Frontispiece and three full-page illustrations. 12mo. Ornamental Cloth, \$1.25.

Does anybody remember the opera of *The Inca*, and that heart-breaking episode where the Court Undertaker, in a morbid desire to increase his professional skill, deliberately accomplishes the destruction of his middle-aged relatives in order to inter them for the sake of practice?

If I recollect, his dismal confession runs something like this:

"It was in bleak November  
When I slew them, I remember,  
As I caught them unawares  
Drinking tea in rocking-chairs."

And so he talked them to death, the subject being "What Really Is Art?"  
Afterward he was sorry—

"The squeak of a door,  
The creak of a floor,  
My horrors and fears enhance;  
And I wake with a scream  
As I hear in my dream  
The shrieks of my maiden aunts!"

Now it is a very dreadful thing to suggest that those highly respectable pseudo-spinsters, the Sister Arts, supposedly cozily immune in their polygamous chastity (for every suitor for favor is popularly expected to be wedded to his particular art)—I repeat, it is very dreadful to suggest that these impeccable old ladies are in danger of being talked to death.

But the talkers are talking and Art Nouveau rockers are rocking, and the trousers of the prophet are patched with stained glass, and it is a day of dinkiness and of thumbs.

Let us find comfort in the ancient proverb: "Art talked to death shall rise again." Let us also recollect that "Dinky is as dinky does;" that "All is not Shaw that Bernards;" that "Better Yeates than Clever;" that words are so inexpensive that there is no moral crime in robbing Henry to pay James.

Firmly believing all this, abjuring all atom-pickers, slab furniture, and woodchuck literature—save only the immortal verse:

"And there the wooden-chuck doth tread;  
While from the oak trees' tops  
The red, red squirrel on the head  
The frequent acorn drops."

Abjuring, as I say, dinkiness in all its forms, we may still hope that those cleanly and respectable spinsters, the Sister Arts, will continue throughout the ages, rocking and drinking tea unterrified by the million-tongued clamor in the back yard and below stairs, where thumb and forefinger continue the question demanded by intellectual exhaustion:

"L'arr! Kesker say l'arr?"

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## WHERE LOVE CONQUERS.

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### The Reckoning.

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

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The author is not conscious of having taken any liberties with history in preparing a framework of facts for a mantle of romance.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

NEW YORK, *May 26, 1904.*

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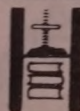








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